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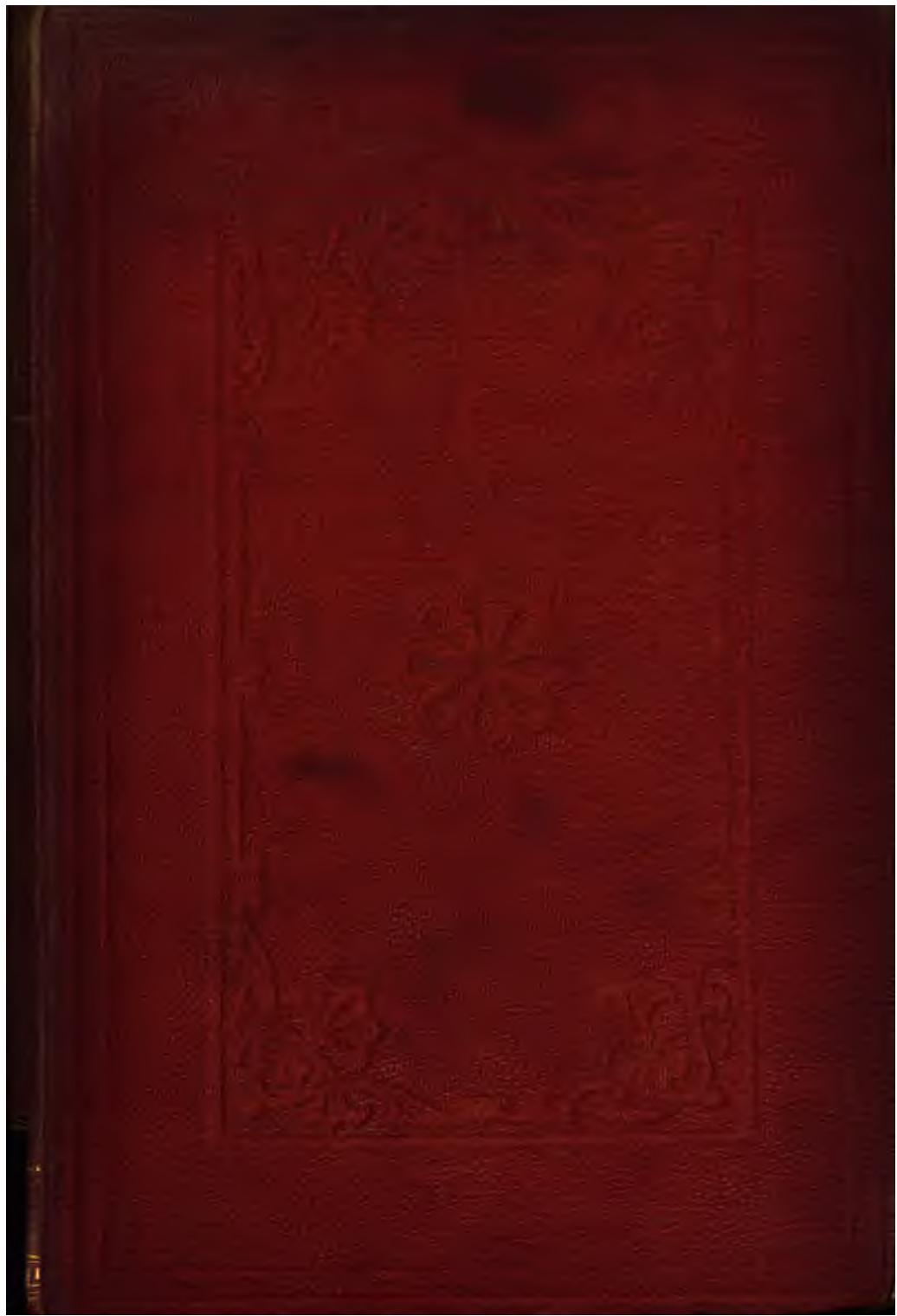
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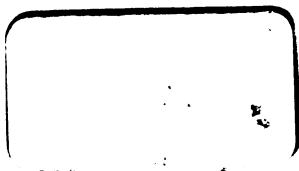
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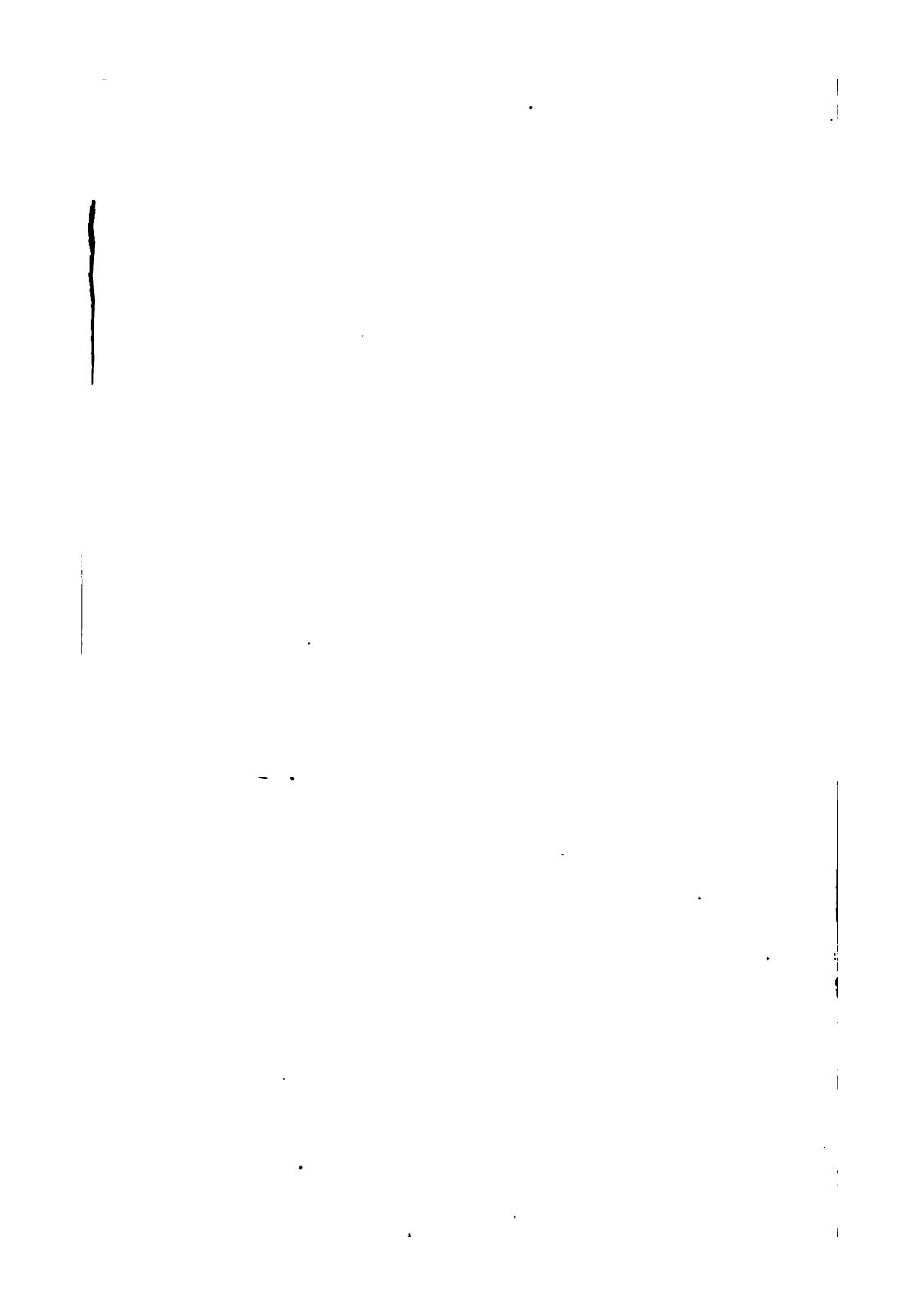




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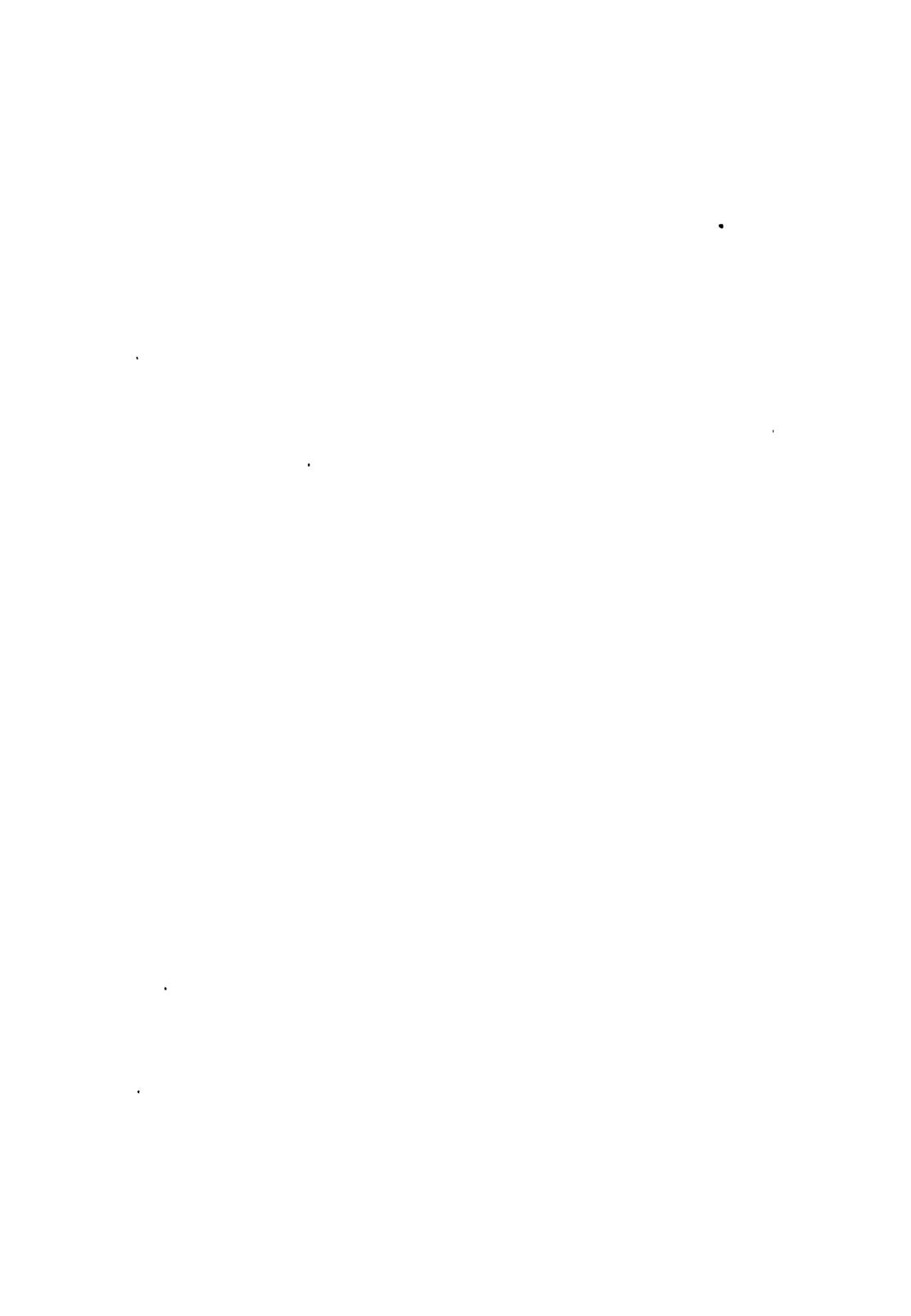






**THE**

**BANE OF A LIFE.**



THE  
BANE OF A LIFE.

A Novel.

BY

THOMAS WRIGHT

(THE "JOURNEYMAN ENGINEER").

AUTHOR OF "SOME HABITS AND CUSTOMS OF THE WORKING CLASSES,"  
"JOHNNY ROBINSON," "THE GREAT UNWASHED," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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# THE BANE OF A LIFE.

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## BOOK II.—(*continued.*)

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### CHAPTER IV.

AT STEPERSON'S.

 MONG her own as among the male sex, Miss Steperson had many acquaintances but few friends. Of these few Kate Fairfield was one, and she was very proud of the distinction which extended to her alone of Bentley's young ladies. She was really fond of dear Carry, as she called her, and then it was not every day that a needle-girl could pick up a friend, who, if she did get up shilling dancing parties, lived in a large house, drove her own little carriage, had plenty of dress and money, and practically did what she liked. To be known as the friend of such a girl was, in Kate's estimation, to argue yourself well known—to gain a reflected glory. Miss Steperson herself, though a steady, was not a gushing friend, and

she hadn't time to be a gossiping one. The invitations to "come and have a cup of tea and a chat with me" were few and far between ; and Kate, when they fell to her lot, regarded them as rather important holiday events—events for which it was necessary to dress up and lose an afternoon's work.

Steperson's servants knew Kate—knew her, in fact, much better than they respected her. The cook spoke of her as "one of them 'ere shilling a day and find themselves madams," and wondered "how the young missus could bemean herself by taking up with such like." The housemaid declared that she had "no patience with a creature like her, a coming there with her touch-me-not airs, as if she was somebody;" and they consoled themselves and each other by saying that "she wasn't up to much, if the truth was known." To her face, however, they had of course to be civil, and when on Monday afternoon she asked, in what she considered to be a decidedly fine-ladyish manner, if Miss Steperson was within, the servant smilingly answered, "Yes, miss ; you're to please to step into her room, she'll be with you in a minute or two. She's just finishing dressing."

The room which Miss Steperson had specially marked as her own was the nearest real life approach to the gorgeous boudoirs which figured so prominently in her favourite stories that Kate had ever seen. It was a bright, cosy,

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nest-like little apartment, which seemed crowded if there were more than three persons in it. The green and gold papered walls were adorned with a number of small paintings, representing dramatic incidents, which gave room for plenty of brilliant colouring. The large mirror—much too large for the room—over the fireplace, rose nearly to the ceiling, and the same complaint of being too large for its place might have been made against the piano, which occupied one side of the apartment. A gilt time-piece occupied the centre of the chimney-piece ; at either end of which there stood a glass-shaded rural group in coloured porcelain, while some vases and statuettes filled the other spaces. On the top of a polished rosewood cabinet, fitting into a recess on one side of the fireplace, was a display of ornamental crystal and china, while a gorgeously bound album and an elaborately carved ivory model of a Chinese tower were displayed on an inlaid centre table, which, with a couch, two lounging and two small chairs covered uniformly in crimson damask, made up the furniture proper of the room.

Not a very tastefully, and certainly not an expensively furnished room this. So at least most people would have thought ; but in this as in other matters ideas are comparative. To Kate Fairfield, Miss Steperson's own room seemed quite a bower of luxury, and never had

it appeared in a more desirable light than when she sank into a seat in it on this occasion.

Just then she had special reasons for thinking that it must be *so* pleasant to have a room of your own. As she glanced round the little apartment, and thought of her friend's independence of position, and then of her own home, and a scene that had taken place there before she came out, she felt not envious, but very wishful. She did not desire to see Miss Steperson deprived of her advantages, but she did wish with an heartfelt sigh that she had similar ones. The thought which followed, like most others to which wishes are parent, was of a hopeful character, being to the effect that perhaps it would not be so long before she had not only a room, but a house of her own, and as well furnished in every part as the Steperson establishment, too.

From the commencement of their acquaintance, Harry Mason had made love to her in a spirit of mingled humility and ambition, which, while it had flattered her vanity, had also influenced her mind. Without saying it in so many words, he had always implied that if he held no other prospect than that of remaining a working-man all his life, he would not have presumed to have lifted his eyes to her. But he had other and higher prospects. He said it not boastfully, he was careful to explain; but in honest justification of his love. What the hopes which he chose to

consider prospects were, the reader already knows. They were unfolded to Kate with force and fervour, for he really loved her, and as really believed in his own power of realizing his dreams of greatness. The moral with which he adorned his flattering tale of love and hope was of course that generally stock, but individually ever-fresh one, that with her love as an incentive to work, her glorifying presence to aid and cheer him in the struggle, and so forth, he would open his oyster in double quick time, and make a name and position for her and himself. Variations of this tale recited during country strolls in the summer gloaming, had formed the serious phases of Harry's love-making, and told in a low earnest tone, with the usual interjectionary pointing in the way of kisses, waist-squeezings, and phrases of endearment, it had not been without its effect upon Kate. To such seed as this her mind was no barren ground, and of late circumstances at home had tended to foster its growth, had caused her to look upon the home which love painted, and helped her—by the contrast it afforded—to the conclusion that she liked the picture. This picture it was which came before her mental vision as she sat in the lounging chair in Miss Stepersson's room, and felt consoled by the thought that she might have such a room herself at no very distant date.

It was a pleasant train of thought, and she was beginning to follow it up by indulging in

the gratifying reflection that a home of this kind would enable her to "take the shine out of" a lot of her friends, when her reverie was cut short by the entrance of Miss Steperson, who greeted her with a "Well Kate, here you are then?"

"Yes, here I am," answered Kate, "ready to chat till further orders, as Charley Thompson said on Saturday."

"Oh, Charley's coming this evening : at any rate, I've asked him; and I hope, Kate, you are not vexed with me for not asking Mr. Mason to come? You know he's a stranger to me ; and besides, to tell you the truth, my dear, I didn't take to him."

"I saw that, Carry ; and I must say that I'm surprised, for, whether he was anything to do with me or not, I will say that he's a most gentlemanly young fellow."

"Well, as you have known him longer than me, Kate, and are most likely to be right," she said, in a half-laughing way, "I don't mind saying that I thought him about the most conceited and selfish fellow ever I met."

"Ah! that was just because you didn't know him, Carry," answered Kate, with just a shade of warmth in her manner. "Any one that does know him will tell you that he's far cleverer and a better scholar than most other working young fellows, and one that is sure to get on in the world, and be something a good deal better than a working-man ; and if he can't help showing it,

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you know, dear, that can't be called conceit. Then as to his being selfish, that I am sure he isn't: he'd go through fire and water to serve any one he liked."

"He's told you he'd do so for you, I suppose, Kate; but he ought to have said to *win* instead of serve you. From what I've seen or heard of him, he's not at all the person to serve any one except as a means of serving himself."

"Oh, of course I know there's a good many that don't like him," said Kate, with a little shrug.

"Well, you are not one of the number, Kate, any way," said Miss Steperson, laughing, "for I begin to believe that you really do mean to make a match of it this time."

"I don't exactly say that," said Kate, with a slight blush.

"Others do, though; and I say again, I do begin to think they're right at last."

"Well, Carry dear, whether they are or not, I will say that I might easily do a worse thing for myself."

"Well, I hope you might, Kate; and I will admit that I am not a fair judge. I feel prejudiced against him."

"That I'm sure you do, Carry, for, upon my word, and I wouldn't care who heard me say it, he's a darling, handsome, clever young fellow, that any girl might be proud of."

Kate was quite in earnest in her defence of Harry, still she spoke in a playful way, and it

was in the same half-smiling, half-serious manner, that Miss Steperson observed—

“ You are in love with him then, eh, Kate? ”

“ Well, between ourselves, Carry, I think I ought to be,” answered Kate. “ I do believe he loves the very ground I walk on. You’ve no idea how kind and attentive he is about me, and in such a nice gentlemanly way, too—just like Frank Hamilton, you know, Carry.”

She hesitated a moment before making this last remark, and blushed and dropped her eyes as she spoke, but Miss Steperson, who during the conversation had sank from a sitting to a reclining position on the couch, did not notice her friend’s confusion, and laughingly answered—

“ Well, I don’t know that that’s a particular recommendation, Kate. Frank’s nice gentlemanly way was a good deal overdone. He used to strike me as being a more stagey walking gentleman off the stage than he was on, and there was more over-acting than under-acting in his style when he was on; and this was just the sort of thing that turned me against this last particular ‘ he ’ of yours on Saturday. I don’t know whether you’ll quite understand me, Kate, but he seemed to me to want all the stage and play at his audience.”

“ Oh, I understand you well enough ; but whatever you may think of Harry, I’m sure I’ve heard you say many a time, Carry, that you thought Frank was a nice fellow.”

"So I say still: he was a nice fellow in many ways; and I've no doubt he made love very nicely. In fact, Kate, I suppose—speaking seriously, you know—you really were sweet on him, and I don't wonder either, for he was all a dash, was Frank, though I don't think he was much else, so that after all the miss was perhaps the best prize in that quarter."

"Well, never mind about that now. All that I wanted, Carry, was for you to understand that I wasn't going with some muff of a fellow, for whatever else he may be, Harry isn't that; but don't believe me, ask your favourite, Charley Thompson—on the quiet, you know—what sort of a fellow my Harry is."

Miss Steperson smiled as she thought of what had already passed between Charley and herself, but wishing to evade any allusion to it, she answered, "I used to think, Kate, that Charley was after you himself: he used to talk to me about you."

"Well, to tell you the truth, Carry, we used to be a bit spooney sometimes when we got together, for he's a jolly fellow. But then you know his chaffing style; he always used to say that he wouldn't like to tackle me without he had five hundred a year, and even when he was most love-sick—and though I say it, he was often a good deal that way—he would only sigh and wish he had that much, so you may guess how far he was after me in earnest."

"Oh, but that was only Charley's way of putting it," answered Miss Steperson. "I know his ideas about this sort of thing. What he really meant was, very likely, merely that he did not think that you were the kind of girl to make yourself and him comfortable on a working-man's wages; so while he loved you he left you, and, as I think, served you in doing so. And that, Kate, illustrates what I meant just now when I said that it was about winning not serving you, that this Harry of yours ought to have spoken. His income is no better than Charley's, but you see he doesn't ask himself whether or not you'd be likely to be happy on it."

"Oh now, that's just where you are mistaken," exclaimed Kate, and at last becoming "wrathful at such arraignment foul," she proceeded to give Miss Steperson a version of Harry's tale and moral.

"Well, that's all very nice," said Miss Steperson, when Kate had finished; "still you know it's a little high-flown, and a good deal easier said than done. However, I hope it will come off all right in your case, for, after all, Kate, I don't want to run down your none-such. In fact, I wouldn't have mentioned him, only I thought you were offended because I hadn't asked him here. It struck me you looked vexed when I came into the room."

"Very likely I did," answered Kate, "for I had been that put out before I came from

home, that I believe I actually cried with vexation."

"Why, what had been the matter?"

"What's been the matter a good many times lately," she replied. "A row with my mother. I don't mind telling you, Carry, but I'm regular miserable at home; they've pretty well nagged the life out of me of late. At one time I could never dress well enough to please them, and whatever I did was right. But now I can never go to smarten myself up a bit without all sorts of nasty hints being thrown out about extravagance; being too fast; what people must think of me; my wages not getting this or that thing, and all the rest of it. The long and short of it is, they seem to be tired of me, and I'm sure I'm tired of them as they've been lately. I wish to goodness I had a situation that would enable me to keep myself properly away from home."

"Or, that you had a home of your own, eh?" said Miss Steperson, smiling.

"Well, that's to be considered," answered Kate. "However, talking about it only puts me out of the way and don't mend the matter, so let us speak of something else."

Miss Steperson was quite agreeable, and the conversation was accordingly changed; the prospects of the dancing season and a variety of other topics being discussed, until the arrival of Charley Thompson at eight o'clock.

Since Saturday Charley had been "thinking

things over." He had been annoyed at what he conceived to be the aggressively self-assured manner that Harry Mason had displayed when he met him in The Limes; had felt the spirit of rivalry stirred within him, and at first decided to have a try at "cutting Mr. Harry out." Later, however, worthier thoughts had come. He thought of Fanny and Kate; told himself, as he had often done since the coming-of-age party, that if he meant anything serious it was with Fanny; and that it would be wrong both to her and Kate for him to make love to the latter again, especially as his almost lover-like relations with her had quietly fallen through without injury or unpleasantness to any one. Thinking of these things he finally resolved, as he walked to Steperton's on the Monday evening, that while Kate was a deuce of a nice girl, and one that he liked very much, he wouldn't make a fool of himself with her—meaning that he wouldn't fall into his old half-serious style of making love to her, even if she seemed disposed to allow him to do so. But with one of Charley's disposition, a resolve of this kind was easier made than kept, and as he met Kate's look of welcome, and saw her face brighten as he entered Miss Steperton's little room, he felt his weakness assailing him. He could not help putting a little meaning softness into his voice as he said, "This looks like old times once more, Kate, seeing you every other day. But I shall be

looking you all up again," he added, in a more off-handed way, as he remembered his virtuous resolves. "How are the talent generally getting on?"

"Oh, all right, Charley. Just beginning to look out for their big brothers, you know, now that the evenings are drawing in."

"Ah, I shall have no pretty sister to let me take care of her now," said Charley, relapsing into the softer vein again, and glancing over at Kate.

"Don't cry out before you've any occasion, Charley," she answered, smiling. "I dare say some one will take pity on you, if you are very good."

"Well, we'll see," said Charley, who was still self-possessed enough to know that he was drifting into the very situation he had determined to avoid; "but the great question now is about my stewardship. It's my first appearance in that character, and I want to do it in style."

This turned the conversation on to a lengthened discussion of the details of the arrangements for the long quadrille night, but even in this Kate and Charley found so many opportunities for little sentimental twistings, that at length Miss Steperson was led to make some pointed remarks upon the ease with which old broth was sometimes warmed up.

Their sentimental banter, however, was sufficiently indefinite to be practically harmless,

and at nine o'clock Kate suddenly rose from her seat and announced that she must go.

"Oh no, not already, Kate," said Miss Steperson. "Why that's only nine that's struck, and besides, here's Charley will see you home."

"I'd stop if I could, Carry," she said, "but upon my word I ought to have been gone now. I promised to meet some one at nine."

"Oh, I see," said Charley; "the serpent that stung me now wears my crown. But never mind, Kate, I wont be a dog in the manger; you mightn't think so some day, but there's no one wishes you better than I do, or who would go further out of their way to do you a good turn than I would."

"Well, don't get pathetic, Charley," said Miss Steperson, laughing; "after all, she's not the loved and lost yet."

"I shall begin to think you are both poking fun at me if you get on in that style," said Kate; "but at any rate I must be off."

"I suppose I can see you to the door if I can't see you home?" said Charley.

"Yes, if you come at once."

"Come along then," he said; and they both left the room, and from a slight sound of scuffling in the passage, and a rather loudly whispered "Only one, Kate," Miss Steperson rightly surmised that Charley kissed her at parting.

"Well, she's a jolly girl, Carry," he said when he came back. "Hang it! I should be sorry to

see her make a mull of it. Did you say anything to her about that?"

"Oh yes, we had it over at full length ; in fact, nearly had a bit of a shine over it. I hadn't forgotten Saturday, and rather pitched into her Harry, and of course she didn't like that."

"Then I suppose she is sweet on him ?" he questioned.

"Well, that's as may be, Charley," she answered, musingly. "I've been trying to put two and two together about it, but somehow I can't reckon it up."

"In that case then, I should say it was extremely doubtful, for you are generally pretty good at making out those sort of things."

"Well, in a general way I am, Charley ; but in this affair there's a double-shuffle about Kate's style that's very hard to follow. If I judged by what she said, I should put it down as a clear case of spoons ; but there seemed to be a something forced in the way in which she said it and in her manner towards him on Saturday, that took a great deal of the meaning out of her words."

"Oh, I don't know, Carry," said Charley, with an amused smile. "I should hardly fancy there was any of the if-you-only-knew-all sort of mystery about Kate's affairs."

"Then I just think there is, Charley ; in a commonplace way, of course. She rather let the

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cat out herself at the last. She's very uncomfortable at home, has rows with the old people about her dressiness and the smallness of her wages, and the like of that—in fact, as I should understand it, gets some pretty stiff hints to go."

"I've heard something of this before," said Charley; "and now I see what you are driving at. You think she's beginning to look at marriage as a means of getting away from home?"

"Yes; and as this fellow is going in for marriage, and does the grand, she's inclined to close with him, and tries to believe in his being the great card that it appears he has persuaded himself that he is."

"Mightn't it simply be a case of smite on her side as well as his? He's a good-looking fellow, and I'll be bound to say can be very nice where he's held as he is towards Kate."

"I think not, Charley," said Miss Steperson, replying to his question. "I know her well, and after what passed on Saturday I watched her closely. I should say that, as far as real love goes—love for a fellow apart from any calculations about homes and marriages—she has less for this Mason than for either yourself or Frank Hamilton. There was more love in her face when you came in to-night, than there was all the while she was talking about him."

"Well, I should both hope and think not,"

said Charley ; "but never mind that. Who is this Frank Hamilton ? I've heard his name coupled with Kate's two or three times."

" Let me see. No ! you wouldn't know him : it was just before you came to the town," answered Miss Steperson, after a few moments' deliberation. " He was a young actor, who came down here with a company for a short season—a handsome, well-educated fellow, something like this Harry Mason, only in his case it wasn't so much put on. He had been pretty well connected and brought up, but had got stage-struck, and broke with his family over it. However, while he was in Stonebury he was taken ill, and couldn't go on with the company to another town, and with no salary coming in he couldn't well keep on his lodgings, so father brought him to our place till he should get better and drop into another engagement."

" And Kate met him, and love-making followed?"

" Yes, pretty strong love-making, and there was no mistake about it being mutual. Only he actually couldn't keep himself at the time, I believe they'd have made a marriage of it. But at length he got an engagement about two hundred miles away, and I suppose absence conquered love, for we heard nothing of him afterwards."

" Ah well, those sort of affairs do very often

fall through, and let's hope that it will be so in this case," said Charley : " it would be the best thing that could happen for all concerned."

" From what I can see, I believe it would," assented Miss Steperson, and then the conversation turned once more on dancing and quadrille-night arrangements, and returned no more to Harry Mason's love affairs that evening, though on the following one Charley was again called upon to discuss them.

" Here, Charley, I want to speak to you," Mrs. Mason called to him as he was going out after tea ; and muttering, " Now for it, hang it ! I wish I hadn't mixed myself up with the business," he went in.

" I thought I'd missed you again," she said, as he entered ; " but you don't get dressed as sharp as our Harry. He's off up town already." Having said this by way of letting him know that her son was out, she went straight to the subject of her anxiety by asking, with an affection of carelessness, " Well, did you inquire how the land lay, as you called it, Charley ?"

" Why, yes," he answered, slowly, " I've been taking the bearings a little."

" And what do you think ?" she asked, speaking this time without the slightest attempt at disguising the eager interest she felt.

" Well, Mrs. Mason, it's only what I think, mind you ; but I'm afraid there's more truth in your bakehouse story than there is in most of the kind."

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"There, I told you so," she said; and the sense of triumph on this point in some degree lessened the feeling of misery she experienced on hearing this further confirmation of her fears about Harry. "But what did you hear, Charley?" she asked presently.

"I didn't hear anything very pointed; hardly so much, in fact, as you heard in the bakehouse; but I find that Bentley's talent and others who know Kate, and are well up in love-making affairs, are of opinion that this time Kate is inclined to plunge—get married, you know."

"I didn't suppose any one ever thought anything else," said Mrs. Mason, with a rather aggravating affectation of surprise.

"A good many are very much astonished to find that it is so, any way," said Charley. "I am for one. I know you don't like that view of the subject, but I thought, as I said before, that your safety lay in Kate not caring enough about Harry to marry him—she used to have big notions about matrimony."

"Oh ay! So she might say, till she got hold of such a fool as our Harry. God forgive me for calling him so, but he is a fool over this."

"Well, it's only over this; and let's hope he'll see his folly before it's too late," said Charley. "Even allowing that all's true we've heard, I've still an idea that Kate wouldn't quite die of a broken heart if the affair came to nothing."

" Well, I don't know anything about her, and don't want to," answered Mrs. Mason ; " but I do know that if he marries her his folly will bring its own punishment. A pretty life of it he would have with her after the home he's been used to ! Do you think I was ever hard on him, Charley ? "

" No, anything but that," answered Charley, who was slightly taken aback at the abruptness of the question.

" Because, when Fan and I were having it over about this, she said not to be hard on him ; but you know I never have been, Charley ; and so I don't mind saying to you that if I had known that he intended to fly the nest as soon as he was feathered, he wouldn't have been feathered so well."

By this time she had wrought herself into a temper, and continued to inveigh against Harry and Kate—against what she honestly believed to be the folly and ingratitude of the one, and the designing character and thriftless habits of the other. Meanwhile, Charley acted as moderator by putting in an occasional allusion to the frequency of slips between the cup and the lip, and suggesting further thought before carrying out her threat of giving her son a piece of her mind, as such a proceeding, he put it, might only make bad worse. This counsel finally prevailed, for, after relieving her mind by a lengthy tirade, Mrs. Mason once more agreed to stay her tongue awhile.

On the following evening it was raining, and Charley, after pottering about his lodgings a little while, went into Mason's, where he found Harry dressed, and Fanny just brushing his hat.

"Holloa! Harry, I was coming to have a chat, but I see you are going out. You're fonder of it than me on an evening like this."

"Previous engagement, my boy."

"You should do like Georgey Clayton and I—make them, weather permitting."

"Yes, but as I haven't been wise in time, I must keep this one. I hear you are getting promotion."

"In what way?"

"Why, aren't you to be one of the stewards on the first of the long quadrille nights?"

"Oh yes, I'm getting on in that line. I suppose you'll be going?"

"Well, I might," he answered, in a manner suggestive of it being very doubtful, but at the same time indicating by a turn of his eyes that this language and tone were merely meant for his sister. "But my turnip warns me I must be going now," he added, looking at his watch, and then taking a last glance at himself in a little looking-glass hanging on one side of the fireplace, he went out.

"My turnip" was one of the minor miseries of Harry Mason's life. It was the only thing about him, when he was cleaned up, that was not genteel, and for that reason he spoke of it as

contemptuously as it was possible for him to do of anything belonging to himself. It was a very correct watch certainly, and had been his father's, but then it was rather large and old-fashioned. Above all, it was only silver, and Harry would fain have had one of the cheap, showy, gold kind, "sported" by most of those who went after the Bentley girls, would have infinitely preferred such a one, even if, like most of its class, it had been a watch of independent action, going and stopping at its own free will, and not been particular to a minute or two per hour when it did go. Still the turnip was better than no watch at all, while it served as well as the best for the important purpose of displaying one of those modern gold alberts, which by a fiction of the Goldsmiths' Hall, keep the word of promise to the law but often break it to the eye, the alloy being so greatly in excess of the gold as to make it hard to believe that it does contain enough of the latter metal to swear by. And so while he scorned the turnip and pulled it out as little as possible in public, he endured it until such time as he should be able to make his get-up "all of a piece" by the purchase of a gold watch.

"Mother out, Fan?" asked Charley, when Harry had gone.

"Yes; she went out to take a cup of tea with a chapel friend, and I suppose she's waiting to see if the rain goes off."

"Oh, well, I'll stop and give you a hand with your work. Have you got any skirts on hand, because those are what I'm best at?"

"Why, really, Charley, to hear you talk any one would think you could sew."

"And to hear you talk, Fan, any one would think I couldn't, though you know very well I'm a first-class hand at putting on buttons, or picking the threads out of anything that's going to be done up again."

"Well, picking threads out isn't sewing," she answered with a smile; "still, we'll say you can sew if you like, though I've nothing I can give you to do to-night, but I'll bring a bit of work for myself down here; it begins to get chilly upstairs."

When she had brought her sewing they seated themselves on each side the kitchen fireplace, and Fanny renewed the conversation by asking—"Who will you take to the quadrille party this time, Charley?"

"Oh, I don't know," he answered, carelessly. "I suppose I shall have to take some one or other. I must try to drop across some girl whose gentleman-in-waiting is not likely to punch my head if I can persuade her to go with me."

"Oh, you needn't be so mild, Charley; you know that you could get Tilly Smith or plenty of others to go with you."

"Well, I daresay I shall get one."

There was a short silence which was again broken by Fanny, who observed, "Mother told me what you and her were talking about Harry last night, Charley."

"Oh, did she?"

"Yes, and she was going on against poor Harry again. You know she is hot-tempered sometimes. Of course, Harry isn't perhaps doing everything that's right; but then, as I told her, Charley, 'after all, mother, we can keep ourselves, and you know young fellows do get married.'"

"That's very true, Fan, and it's very kind of you to say it," observed Charley; "but at the same time, you know, there's young fellows and young fellows, and I should say that your Harry was a young fellow who was 'ower young to marry yet.' Besides, even if you can keep yourselves he ought to do something towards repaying his mother and you for the sacrifices you've made on his account. Apart from all this, his getting married would be a bad thing for himself—and for Kate. For I will say, whatever your mother or you may think, Kate's not a bad girl at bottom, and in good hands might make a good wife, but Harry's are not the hands for her to fall into."

"But yours would be?"

"I know you are sneering, Fan," he said; "but as far as that goes, I do think I could

manage her better than your brother. However, that's not the question."

"Well, no," she answered, "nor I didn't mean to sneer; but will you speak to him about this? you know you said you would."

"I said I would if you wished it," he replied; "and if you do wish it, I won't go from my promise; but my own opinion is that my speaking to him would do more harm than good. I make no allusion to present company, but there's a good many people who think that I was after Kate, and Harry was one of the number. He would be sure to think that I was coming the treacherous rival sort of thing over him, for as I once told himself, he's given to seeing too far through millstones."

"Well, I should like some one to speak to him; he might listen to advice, but he wouldn't care much for what I might say; and if mother talks to him they're almost sure to quarrel, and I don't know any one else to ask besides you."

"Sandy Grant would be a good hand if he would do it."

"But would he, do you think?"

"I've very little doubt he would, if you were to ask him."

"Well, I almost fancy he would myself. He's such a nice man, and then he's so fond of Harry; isn't he?"

"I have a pretty good idea he's very fond of Harry's sister," thought Charley; but he only answered, "He wishes him well, I'm sure."

"Then, Charley, I'll ask him the first good chance I get."

Here another pause in the conversation ensued, but this time the silence was broken by Charley, who, rising from his seat and placing himself with his back to the fire, suddenly exclaimed, "You come, Fan?"

"Come where, Charley?" she asked, looking up from her work in surprise.

"Why, to the quadrille party with me."

"Ah, you don't mean it now," she said, after regarding him for a few moments with a rather puzzled air.

"I do, though," he answered. "Why the deuce shouldn't I? I wonder I didn't think of it at first."

"Perhaps you were thinking of some one else then."

"And perhaps I wasn't; but at any rate I'm thinking of you now. So what do you say?"

"But I'm such a bad dancer."

"Oh no, you are not: you go nice and light, and you know the round dances, and I'll put you up to what you don't know in the quadrilles before the night."

"But then I've no clothes fit to go there in!"

While they had been speaking Charley had

been edging himself towards Fanny's chair, and now stepping behind it and leaning over its low back, he got his arm round her neck, as, in reply to her last objection, he said—"Oh yes, you have. I've seen you in some nice long-skirted dresses, that trimmed up a bit would do first-rate ; and with one of them and a flower or two in your bonny black hair, there you'd be a regular dancing belle."

"No, but do you mean it though, Charley, and no joking?" she said, still a little dubious.

"Well, hang it ! Fan, I'm not such a bad fellow as all that comes to," he answered. "I do mean it : I want you to come. I'll be disappointed if you don't, and I'd sooner take you than any girl in England ; there, now you know all about it," and as if it was quite a recognised mode of giving emphasis to a sentence, he kissed her as he finished speaking.

"Oh, go and sit down, Charley," she said, laughing and blushing.

"No, not till you've said you'll come, mate," he answered, patting her cheeks ; "and if you don't say it soon, I'll kiss you till you do."

"But what will mother say ? I wouldn't like to put her out of the way, especially just now, and you know the chapel people don't like this sort of thing."

"Oh, bother the chapel people," he exclaimed, "especially Brother Waggley ; you know I'm

down on him, Fan. But look here, will you come if I get your mother to say she's agreeable?"

"Yes, I shall like to go myself."

"Very well, that's right so far; and now give me another kiss, and then I'll sit down; I won't be greedy."

"But won't it cost you a lot of money, Charley?" she asked as soon as he was seated.

"Why, no," answered Charley: "let's see. There'll be five shillings for our tickets, three for a cab there and back, and say two shillings for sundries—that's half a sovereign in all; and hang it! if a single young fellow like me, in a regular shop, cannot afford ten shillings for a thing of this kind now and again, it's hard lines."

"Well, of course you know best, Charley."

"I know I shall come and kiss you again if you get on with any more of your buts."

Mrs. Mason, when she came in, was at first rather aghast at the idea of Fanny going to a ball, but as it was more the novelty of the proposition than the thing itself that startled her, she was soon brought round to give her assent, especially as she saw that Fanny was really desirous to go.

"Then I am to understand, Fan, that it's quite settled you'll come?" said Charley, when he was going away.

"Of course, Charley," she answered.

"Not so much of course, perhaps, as you

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think," muttered Charley to himself, when he got outside. "It strikes me that Mr. Harry will want to put a damper on this when he hears of it, but if he says anything to me I shall chop him up."

Charley was right in his conjecture. The next day when Clayton and he were walking home to dinner together, they were joined by Harry, who presently asked—"I say, Charley, is it true that you are going to take our Fan to Steperson's, or have you only been chaffing her?"

"Chaffing her!" exclaimed Charley. "I wouldn't chaff any girl in that style, let alone Fan. Of course I'm going to take her."

"Well, upon my word, Charley, I don't see why you should; she's not in the least up to that sort of thing."

"Well, not as well as she might be, certainly," said Charley; "you see she's not been in a position to go out much till lately—she's had to keep the home going for you."

"Oh, I dare say she would have gone out if she had wanted."

"I dare say she wouldn't. Fan is one of those that thinks more of her relatives' interests than her own, and like most other persons who do so, all that she gets for her pains is to be set down as slow."

"Well, only that I know there can be no

reason for it, Charley, I would think you wanted to be nasty."

"Why, if there was anything of that kind, I should think it was on your side," retorted Charley; "only I know there can be no reason for it, I would fancy that you wanted to keep your sister from having a little enjoyment; and while that would be nasty in a general way, it would be specially so in the present instance, as it was through you I asked her to go."

"Through me!"

"Yes! only I knew it would have huffed you I'd very likely have taken Queen Kate. Indeed, as it was, I once thought of arranging to take her when I met her at Steperton's the other night."

"Well, you might have said 'trying to arrange,'" said Harry, with a forced laugh, and then the conversation dropped.

"By jingo! Charley, you did come down heavy on Harry's corns at dinner-time," said Clayton, when they met in town in the evening.

"I rather fancy I did," he answered: "at any rate I meant to do, and you see I happened to know where the shoe pinched, and I shall tread on a worse corn than any of those I touched to-day if he doesn't watch it. Not that it has anything to do with me, as it happens to be a family matter, but lately his airs both in and out of the shop have been enough to aggravate any fellow to have a hack at him. I'll

be bound to say he thinks none the less of Kate because he fancies he's cut me out with her. He'd never believe that whatever cutting there's been I've done for myself; but if it wasn't for circumstances that you know about, I'd show him all about that."

"That would be doing him a good turn, if it did no one else any harm," said Clayton, laughing.

"Ah, but it wouldn't be right to others, so we'll say no more about it."

While they were being thus talked about, Harry and Kate were talking to each other as they sauntered along the Abbotsgate road. They had been speaking of the coming quadrille night, Harry urging Kate to say that she would go, while she persisted in answering to all his persuasions that "she didn't know," "really hadn't made up her mind," "would see," and so forth.

Though too wary to show it, Harry was secretly fuming at this, and at length his temper got so far the better of him, that he somewhat impatiently exclaimed, "Well, upon my word, Kate, everything seems to be going wrong with me about this party. Here's you won't make me happy by saying that you'll go, although you know you won't be able to stay away when the night comes; and who do you think Charley Thompson is going to take?"

"I don't know! Who?" she said, with an eagerness which, even allowing for female curiosity on such points, Harry was at the moment inclined to regard as a little more than sufficient for the occasion.

"Why! our Fan," he answered; and then having paused for a minute, looking in vain for the expression of surprise which he had expected his information would have elicited, he went on—"Though why he should do so, unless it's to annoy me, I can't understand. She can't dance, and she's almost sure to make a fool of herself—and me. For, of course, nearly every one there will know she's my sister."

"Oh, Charley will see her through," said Kate; and then, after a somewhat lengthy pause, she suddenly exclaimed, "Well! I'll go, Harry! as you say, I should be sure to go when it came to the point, and so I may as well make up my mind at once."

"Ah, now I see you're going to be your better self after all," he answered, smiling. "I *would* have been disappointed if you had said you wouldn't go, but I am afraid even you won't be able to please everybody in the matter; there'll be some disappointed to hear that you are going—for now there'll be no question of who shall be fairest."

## CHAPTER V.

## THE LONG QUADRILLE NIGHT.

 HERE may be people—superior beings, of course—who would consider it derogatory to their noble selves to say that man, as well as the lower animals, is endowed with instinct ; but the self-experience of most of us would, I think, incline us to a belief that such is the case. Not with so strong and well-defined an instinct as that of the beasts certainly ; that would hardly be fair, for man has reason as well. Not with the practical, physical instinct which would cause us to repudiate alum'd bread, or burnt-bean coffee ; to turn in disgust from the chalk mixtures sold to us as milk, and throw away the doctored drinks which, not merely steal away our brains, but burn our throats and destroy our stomachs—not with so marked an instinct as this is man blessed, but with one more refined, more purely mental—an instinct which acts in matters of thought ; upon which it is usually found in antagonism to, and in the event generally proves to have been more prescient than reason. Looking at the combative

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character of this instinct, it would perhaps be more correct to speak of man being afflicted, rather than endowed or blessed, with it ; and those who suffer most from it are such as, in mentally arranging matters pertaining to their own interests, are in the habit of making things pleasant all round—by reason.

Being a person of this type, Harry Mason was much and unpleasantly haunted by his instinct. It was constantly bringing on a reaction of feeling in moments of triumph, and it speedily began to damp his pleasure at having secured Kate's promise to go to the quadrille party with him. When after the picnic he had come to the conclusion that there was nothing left for him but to win Kate, or perish a victim to unrequited love, he at the same time reasoned that if he could win her, his marrying her at an early date could be no possible wrong to his mother or sister ; that indeed, as it was for his happiness, they ought to promote rather than object to such a thing. But here his instinct had come in and troubled him. It told him that his mother and sister, even if they did not definitely oppose his marrying Kate, would not willingly give their consent to his doing so ; and though he tried to persuade himself that reason's was the right view of the case, he so far allowed instinct to triumph, that he was careful to conceal from his mother and Fanny that he was courting

Kate. So far as he knew they were not aware of that circumstance, and he was desirous that they should remain in ignorance of it for some little time longer ; until, in fact, he should be in a position to say, I'm going to get married at such a time, say a month or so from the day of the announcement. His reason—as he had chosen to apply it—had convinced him that this would be the wisest plan, and it was his desire to adhere to it that caused him to entertain objections to Fanny going to the quadrille party. She would be likely to see and hear things there which his reason told him would at the least be the means of informing her, and through her his mother, of his present position towards Kate ; while his instinct went further, and suggested that such knowledge might arouse their indignation and cause them to make a bother—mothers and sisters being so unreasonable about affairs of this nature.

These thoughts had troubled him greatly, even when he had spoken to Charley Thompson, though at that time he had really been in doubt as to whether Kate would attend the party ; but when she had signified her intention of doing so, they returned upon him with a twofold violence, sorely damping his joy. It was dreadfully annoying, he reflected, that Fanny should have taken this whim, of all others, into her head ; but it might be prevented yet ; he would see what he could do

with his mother. Accordingly, an evening or two later than the one referred to at the conclusion of the last chapter, he commenced operations by observing, "I say, mother, don't you think it's very foolish of Fan to talk about going to this party? She's never been to anything of the kind before; for there's a difference between this and a bit of a turn round on a green. If she does go she won't enjoy herself; she'll only be getting in her own way and every one else's. Hadn't you better speak to her?"

Mrs. Mason paused for awhile; paused and thought, and the result of her cogitations was, that she answered, "Well, I don't know much about such things, and I daresay they're not a deal of good to anyone; but I should be very sorry to think that our Fan didn't know how to behave herself, as well as any of the girls that will be there. If she likes to go, and Charley is agreeable to take her, I don't see that there's any more harm in her going than you. She was put on one side often enough when you were an apprentice; I think it's her turn to have a bit of her own way now. As to her being in her own or anybody else's way, Charley will see to that, even if her brother doesn't want to."

Harry, whose instinct had made him aware that his mother had been rather cool towards him since he had been out of his time—despite the assurance of his reason that there was no just occasion for her to be so—had expected

that he might have some little trouble in bringing her to act according to his wishes, but he had certainly never anticipated such a rebuff as she gave him. At first he was inclined to resent it, and was only restrained from doing so by the idea that in her present mood his mother would take an ungenerous advantage of the fact of his still being all behind with the payment of his board money, while she, bethinking her of her promise not to give Harry a piece of her mind just yet, the subject was allowed to drop.

Having fared so badly at the hands of his mother and Charley Thompson, Harry for a short time entertained the idea of seeing what he could do with Fanny herself. "I could manage her," he thought; "but then if I did, Charley would be sure to set it down to me, and try to serve me out. He meant being nasty the other day, whatever he may say; but I suppose it's about Kate. It's all very fine for him to affect the 'I-love-and-I-ride-away' style, but he don't like being cut out any more than anyone else. Not that I've anything to blame myself with in the matter, for, apart from it being an open affair, it served him right whoever had done it. He would have liked to have been head man, as he calls it, without pledging himself; and, what's more, he thought, and wished others to think, that he could be, and he's savage with me for demonstrating the contrary, especially as several Earl Percies saw him fall. That's about how it

is ; and now I think of it, I do seriously believe that it is to annoy me that he's going to take Fan. I suppose he fancies that if she and my mother get to know how I stand with Kate, they'll put an end to it ; but he makes a great mistake ; not all that they, or he, or anyone else can do, shall 'strain the seeming silken texture of this tie.' After all, mother knowing it a little sooner than I intended, can't make much difference ; so I'll just let things take their course, and stand the hazard of the die." So ran Harry's reflections, which, as well as his spoken sentiments, it pleased him to be able to round off with quotations, and by the time he had arrived at the conclusion not to speak to his sister, he was once more in a tolerably self-satisfied humour.

The result of his decision was that Fanny's pleasurable anticipations in connexion with the quadrille night were left unclouded. Had he spoken to her as he had to his mother, she would probably have given up the idea of attending the party, and would certainly have been made miserable, but as it was, everything seemed bright to her. When at Bentley's she had heard a great deal of the glories of these nights, and had sometimes secretly sighed that circumstances did not permit her to participate in them ; but now she was not only going to one of these parties, but was going with Charley at his own special entreaty. Further, the arrangement was the

means of bringing Charley to their house almost every evening, and of their having *such* fun practising the quadrilles. Just at this time Fanny had an assistant working for her, a young lady who was one of the extras at Bentley's in the busy season, and went out by the day at other times. She was a good dancer, and on the evenings when Clayton called for him, Charley would take him into Mason's, and shouting, "Clear the kitchen!" would shove the table aside, and insist upon Fanny and the other girl coming down and having a dance. On evenings when Clayton and the assistant were not available, he would seize upon Harry, and, better still, upon Mrs. Mason. At first she had been indignant at his "imperence" in asking her to dance, but after a while she was persuaded to stand up, and at length came to enjoy the fun as much as any of them, laughing heartily at her own blunders, and chorusing Charley's "Well done, our side," when he had succeeded in getting her through a set with fewer mistakes than usual. In this way Fanny was taught the quadrilles, and, as Charley put it, got her leg in again at the round dances, while her mind was soon set at rest respecting the only other point in connexion with the party on which she had any misgivings—her dress.

"Well, I've done up the dress I'm thinking of going in, Charley," she said to him one evening when he had found her alone in the house.

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"Perhaps you remember it?—a white tarlatan that I got to go with the chapel trip last summer, and I've only worn it two or three times since."

"I know it; but wouldn't you like to have a little colour about it?"

"Of course, Charley; but wait till I tell you. I've trimmed it with a bit of blue ribbon, bows at the sleeves, and a small *rouché* round the neck; and with my broad blue waist ribbon fastened with a gilt fret work buckle, I don't think it'll look so bad—do you?"

"Well, hang it! I can hardly say, without seeing you in it," he answered. "Go and put it on."

"You wont mind waiting here by yourself till I do?"

"O no; go on, and if you want me to come and lace your stays or hook your dress, or anything of that sort, call me."

"Very well," she said, laughing, as she ran upstairs. "I wont be long."

Nor, looking at the circumstances of the case, was she, as at the end of a quarter of an hour she was again in the kitchen attired in the dress of which she had spoken, and with a couple of small white roses twined in her dark curls. As she stood before him, Charley gazed at her with unaffected admiration, thinking that never before had she looked so lovely, and feeling quite

assured that never had or could any one look more thoroughly loveable.

"Oh, Fan!" he exclaimed, "if it wasn't for crushing the dress, wouldn't I hug you, that's all!"

"How do you like it? Will it do; will I do?" she asked, scarcely noticing his exclamation in her anxiety about the dress.

"Do!" he said. "You'll a lot more than do, my dear. What did I tell you? Why, you'll be the belle of the ball; there'll be a regular run upon you, and I shall have to fight some one before the night is out."

"No, now, Charley, don't get on with your nonsense. Tell me properly, will I do?"

"Now, look here!" exclaimed Charley, taking hold of her by the hand. "I wont stand any more of this. Just you come along, my lady." Opening the parlour door as he spoke, he led her in front of the pier glass, and then went on, "Now look at yourself, and then if you ask me again whether you'll do, I'll chance all about crumpling the dress."

"Well, I do think I'll pass, Charley," she said, presently—"in the crowd, you know."

"No, hang it! *not* in the crowd, Fan. You'll be right away from the ruck, and able to hold your own with the stars. Speaking honestly, without any idea of chaff or flattery, you look perfectly charming"—and she did.

The long skirts fell lightly and gracefully about her, and seemed to add to her height. The low cut neck, short sleeves, and well fitting body, displayed her soft white throat, plump shapely arms, and nicely proportioned bust, to the best advantage. The flowers in her hair and a flush of pleasurable excitement on her cheeks, gave a special softness of expression to her face, while the smile elicited by Charley's commendation caused her dimples to show effectively. Finally, the lightness both in colour and material of the dress gave her a general freshness and airiness of appearance, which, in addition to being a beauty in itself, enhanced the effects of her more special points of beauty.

"And I'm jolly glad you do look so nice in your dress, Fan," Charley went on after a pause, during which he released her hand, and began to play with the roses in her hair : "not for my sake—though I dare say I shall feel all the prouder of you when I see you creating a sensation—but for your own. You know there's some people who think because you've been a steady girl and stuck to the home—been, in fact, the best little girl in the world,—because you've not been selfish and gadded about,—they think you're slow and dowdy ; but I only wish some fellow that I was free to have a cut at would say so to me outright."

"Why, what would you do, Charley ?" she

said, looking up in his face, and he catching the merry twinkle in her eye was suddenly awakened to a sense of the fact that in his earnestness he was making himself ridiculous, and laughingly answered—

“ Well, I suppose it would be something less than manslaughter, after all, Fan ; but all the same, I’m glad that you’ll be able to take the shine out of a lot of those who think a good girl must be a slow one ; you’ll beat them on their own ground this turn. You’ll try, if I’ll back you, wont you ?”

“ O yes, if you wish me to,” she answered, laughing.

“ Then I shall wish you to, mate, when the night comes ; and there’s one thing I want you to promise me now.”

“ What’s that, Charley ?”

“ Not to let any one see you in this dress again till the night of the ball—not *anyone*, understand.”

“ Very well, Charley, I wont ; and now I’ll go and take it off.”

“ Go on, then,” he said ; and then, as if unconsciously, or by some common impulse, her face was raised, and his lowered until their lips met in “ a long, long kiss—a kiss of youth and love.”

Charley’s verdict that Fanny would more than do was fully confirmed on the night of trial. The ball proved a triumph for her—a triumph from beginning to end ; *the* triumph,

in short, of the night, which became known in the annals of Steperson's quadrille nights as the one on which "Little Dimples came out so strong, you remember."

It was a fairly won triumph, too ; the *habitués* of Steperson's being severely critical upon first appearances, and such predisposition as existed among them in her case was rather against her. Charley Thompson being a bit of notability amongst them, there had been some curiosity to know whom he would take to the party when he could no longer take Kate. It had been thought that he would "stick up to" Tilly Smith—a proceeding that would have afforded a little excitement to the lookers on, as a number of others who fancied themselves were already sticking up to the dashing leader of the Dauntless Three. There was, consequently, a feeling of disappointment when it came out—through Kate Fairfield telling it in Bentley's workroom—that he was going to take little Dimples. Those who knew her expressed themselves surprised. She was a nice enough little girl, certainly, they said ; steady and all that, you know, but seldom went out anywhere—had never been to an affair of this sort before, and wouldn't know her way about. While those who did not know her argued from that very fact that she couldn't—from a quadrille point of view—be up to much. In brief, it was supposed

that Charley had acted either whimsically or foolishly in making such a selection, and that Fanny's *début* would be a failure, if not an absolute break down.

Being aware of all this, Charley purposely went late to the party, in order that, all being assembled, the victory of which he felt confident should be greater.

"There'll be quite fifty couple here to-night, Fan," he said to her as their cab drew up at Steperson's, "and they'll stare at you pretty hard as you go in, but don't let any quantity of gape seed flurry you ; keep cool, whatever you do. A good entry is half the battle."

"Well, if they do stare at me, Charley, I shall be sure to be a bit nervous, so I tell you ; but, of course, I'll do my best not to show it. But who'll be there mostly ?"

"There'll be all Bentley's lot, counter-girls as well ; and there'll be the Jew counter-men and shop-girls from the *Marte Universelle*. You'll know them by their noses, and greasy hair, and the quantity of jewellery they wear ; and you'll see one or two rare handsome girls among them too. Then, of course, there'll be a lot of other counter-men and shop-girls, and some of the young Abbotsgate swells, and a good many of the station-clerks, and our set, with perhaps one or two young tradesmen and a few tradesmen's daughters."

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As Charley got to the end of his catalogue, the cab pulled up at Steperton's, and in another minute, during which Charley had whispered, "Remember, Fan : keep cool, and look as if you were used to it," they were in the dancing room, with, as Fanny became painfully aware, every eye fixed upon them. This and the whispered exclamations of surprise, such as "I say, look at Dimples;" "My word, isn't little Dimples coming out strong? doesn't she look nice?" which she caught as they slowly made their way through the assembly, sadly discomfited her immediately upon their entrance. For a moment she could see nothing but a confused mass of faces and colours, and Charley could feel her trembling on his arm; but a whispered, "Don't be frightened, darling," from him, and the consciousness that after all there was more of admiration than anything else in the rather overwhelming amount of notice bestowed upon her, together with her intense desire to please and do credit to Charley, reassured her.

By the time they got to the centre of the room, she was smilingly returning the bows of her friends, and looking with a pleased interest at the scene around her. Not that it was a particularly striking scene to anyone used to such matters ; still, it was a sufficiently animated one, and to Fanny, to whom it was new, it seemed a brilliant one also. Being in the trade, she

could see at a glance that the dresses of most of the girls were of cheap tawdry material—could have told to within a penny or two how much, or rather how little, per yard or dress-piece they had cost. Nevertheless, for one night only, they looked as well as best, and being mostly made up of bright and tolerably well harmonized colours, and surmounted by head-dresses in which there was plenty of gilt and glitter, they gave a general air of gaiety to the scene. Among the gentlemen there was a tolerably good display of cheap patent leather boots, white kid gloves and mosaic jewellery, the coloured glass in which sometimes really sparkled when it happened to catch the rays of the gaslight favourably.

Georgey Clayton was the first of their friends who spoke to them. "Excuse me saying it so pointedly, Miss Mason," he said to Fanny, when he had exchanged greetings with Charley, "but, by Jove ! you've made the hit of the night already. There'll be a rush upon you directly ; and though I don't think you'd forget old friends, I want to make myself safe, so you must promise me a couple of dances."

"Must I, Charley ?" she whispered.

"Oh yes," he answered, smiling.

"After Charley, of course," said Clayton, laughing. "He'll have the first—or rather, the second, as the first was over when you came in—but promise me the next, and the last but one,

say. But I see Charley hasn't got you a programme yet," he went on, glancing at her hand. "We do everything in style to-night, you know."

"Yes," laughed Charley; "programmes a penny each, to be had at the refreshment *buffet*; the refreshment *buffet*, Fan, being a closet where you can get coffee and lemonade and penny ices at threepence each. That's our style."

"Well, you needn't rasp the gilt off in that style," said Clayton; "but, however, I'll go and bring a programme, and then I can take the liberty of booking myself."

While he was away Mr. Parker came up, and addressing Charley as his unpunctual fellow-steward, requested to be introduced to Fanny, and this having been done, he asked her for a dance. This time she only looked her "Must I, Charley?" and on his smiling an affirmative, she informed Mr. Parker by a simple "Yes," that he *might* "have the honour of her hand for the first dance for which it was disengaged."

"Then I'd better enter you too," said Clayton, who came up with the programme while Mr. Parker was expressing his delight in set terms. "That makes three you're engaged for, you see, Miss Mason," he went on, handing her the card. "You put the initials opposite the dances, like that, then you know who your partners are to be."

"Unless some one that you like better turns up, you know," said Charley, "and then you must tell the first one that you had been engaged to the second one before he spoke, only you forgot at the moment."

"Oh no, Charley, I wouldn't do that."

"Then, my dear, you won't do to go to dancing parties."

"You should serve him in that way for giving you such advice," said Clayton, as they began to make their way up the room again.

"I think I shall," she answered, at the same time giving Charley's arm a squeeze which said as plainly as words could have done, "I don't mean it, you know, Charley."

Her whole manner made this so abundantly evident, that Charley thought the arm-pressing a rather unnecessary proceeding; but wishing to do all in his power to put her at ease, he returned a corresponding squeeze, which said, "Why, of course you don't. I know that, Fan."

From the moment she entered, her brother had been watching her with greater astonishment probably than any other person present. He was standing at the other end of the room, and now, as Charley and Fanny came near him, he turned to Kate Fairfield, exclaiming, "Well, upon my word, she doesn't look so bad!"

"So bad!" echoed Kate. "She looks about the best of any girl in the room. I'll go and speak

to her." This she said interrogatively, but perhaps Harry did not catch the inflection of her voice. At any rate he made no answer; but she was saved from any embarrassment which his silence might have caused by Fanny at that moment catching sight of her brother, and instantly beginning to make her way towards him.

"There's Harry, Charley!" she had exclaimed as soon as her eye lighted upon him. "Let's go and speak to him."

"And to Kate, too," he whispered, drawing her back for a moment. "It wont do to be showing family jars here, you know."

"Oh! Charley, as if I would," she whispered; "and beside, I've no ill will to Kate about this."

Charley smiled at the manner in which she unconsciously emphasized the *this*; but he was perfectly satisfied with the answer, and took off the slightly restraining pressure he had laid upon her.

"Well, Harry, here we are, you see," said Fanny, as soon as she got up to him, and then she offered her hand to Kate, who pressed it warmly, and addressed her as Fanny dear; whereat Fanny's conscience rather smote her, for Kate had always been very friendly towards her, while, since she had left Bentley's, she had often said and thought hard things of Kate.

"Yes, here you are; and a pretty swell you

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are, too," said Harry, in reply to her observation to him.

"I don't know, Harry," she said. "It's the dress I had last year, and I'm sure it's not an expensive one. Is it, Kate?"

"He only means that you look very pretty in it," answered Kate, smiling. "These fellows don't know anything about girls' dresses."

"You speak for your own side of the house," said Charley. "Fan here can tell you whether or not I know anything about dresses. I'll be bound to say you haven't many hands at Bentley's that can beat me at making skirts."

"There, Kate, that's how he goes on down at our house sometimes, till people that don't know him can hardly tell whether to believe him or not!"

"Oh, there's ingratitude!" exclaimed Charley. "Don't you ask me to help you with your work any more; but never mind that now. How many deep are you engaged, Kate?"

"Four."

"I suppose you can give me the fifth?"

She nodded assent, and the cornet giving the signal for the dancers to take their places, the conversation came to an end at that point.

"Now do your best, Fan. There'll be a lot of them taking stock of you for your first dance," whispered Charley, as the music struck up. "It's

only a polka ; you can manage that first rate. Come along," and the next moment they were among the dancers.

Among those who did take stock of Fanny's performance none watched her more curiously than her brother, who, to his great surprise, found that she was a much better dancer than himself ; for, having acquired the art quite recently, he was not at all first class at it—was by no means so clever with his feet as his tongue, as Georgey Clayton took occasion to remark to Charley later in the night.

Having got through the dance successfully, Fanny now felt quite at ease, and chatted and laughed gaily as they began to make their way about the room again when the music stopped. More than one of those who had worked with her at Bentley's offered her friendly congratulations, and none more warmly or so slangily as Tilly Smith.

"It's too bad of you, though, to come and knock us all out of time like this," she said, shaking her head, after they had shaken hands and exchanged "How are you's." "But never mind ; don't apologize, Fan ; I forgive you, dear, for the sake of old times."

"Oh ! I thought you were going to say for my sake," said Charley. "You might have done ; but, however, give me the first waltz ; that will do as well."

"I think I partly promised you the other night, didn't I?" she said, with a significant smile.

"Of course you did."

"Ah! then I must go and tell the other fellow."

"Oh, what stories, Charley!" whispered Fanny, when Tilly had gone.

"Only white ones, Fan, like I was telling you about just now."

"Then I suppose Tilly likes you better than the other fellow?"

"Well, from a waltzing point of view, I have no doubt she does. She's a flying goer, and knows I can take her along, while the other fellow performs, perhaps, in the clod-crushing style."

"Don't bounce, Charley," said Clayton, who came up at that moment.

"Oh, I'm only speaking in a general way," said Charley, laughing; "but here's Fan for you; and now I must go and see my fellow-steward, or I shall be losing my job."

"Well, Mr. Parker, is there anything I can do now to make up for lost time?" he asked.

"No, there's been nothing particular for either of us to do yet. I saw you speaking to Kate just now. Did you ask her to dance?"

"Yes."

"And what did she say?"

"It was all right."

"Oh, I was wondering whether 'my Harry' would allow her to dance with any of the discarded. But I suppose she doesn't ask his leave?"

"I don't suppose he would wish her to do so."

"It would be all the same if he did, I expect."

"Well, that's his look-out," said Charley, turning away; "but mine is to find a partner."

Whenever they came together again in the course of the night, Mr. Parker referred to the subject of Harry and Kate, his observations concerning them becoming more and more offensive after each of the several visits he paid to an adjoining tavern, for the purpose of indulging in what he styled some "stronger tipple" than was to be found at the refreshment *buffet*. On a number of these occasions he had tried to induce Charley to accompany him, and again in the small hours, when there was only another two or three dances to come off, he returned to the charge.

"Now, come along, old fellow!" he urged, in a thick undertone. "I can see it's only the apron-strings that's keeping you back; but the little lady can let you out of her sight for a few minutes, surely? By-the-way, they tell me she's 'my Harry's' sister; but she's a devilish pretty little girl, and lively, too. How the deuce,

though, did you come to pick her up? Doesn't she go in for the steady, and the religious, and all the rest of it? But I suppose you are going to put her through her facings; and a jolly good start you've made to-night, too. But come on, old boy, just let's have one glass together—fellow-stewards, and all that you know."

"Come on, then," said Charley, with a suddenness, and, as it vaguely struck Mr. Parker, a fierceness that was a little surprising after his persistent refusals.

"Ah, well, here we are then," said Mr. Parker, touching the bell as they seated themselves in the coffee-room of the public-house. "Nominate your poison."

"I'll have a glass of beer," said Charley, in reply to this request; whereupon Mr. Parker called for two glasses of bitter, and as soon as they had been supplied returned to the subject which seemed to have taken possession of him, by abruptly asking, "Did you notice me speaking to Kate?"

"No."

"Oh, I asked her for a dance."

"Well?"

"She gave it me in a minute, but 'my Harry' didn't seem to like it at all; but he's too spooney on her to contradict her, or else sees that she's not half sweet enough upon him to stand contradiction from him. I don't think we need be

particularly downhearted, old pal," he went on, after taking a sip at his ale. "Girls aren't always lost to their old loves even if they do get spliced. They sometimes like a gentleman friend as well as a husband—do you see, my boy?" and he leaned across the table and poked Charley in the ribs.

Charley had been sitting with his elbows on the table, and his countenance concealed in a great measure by his hands ; and it was not till he raised his head to assure himself by a hasty glance round the room that they were still alone, that Mr. Parker became aware of an angry flush on his face and a glaring expression about his eyes. When he did observe these signs he was unpleasantly startled by them ; for though by this time rather muddled by drink, he instantly saw that he had made some mistake, though he had calculated that he could not possibly have a more sympathetic listener than Charley. Still less than his looks did he like the low grinding tone in which Charley began to speak :—

"Look here, Mr. Parker," he said. "I didn't want to make a noise in the room, and so I came out here on purpose to speak to you. What you may think about other people has perhaps nothing to do with me, but it has to do with me that you should think I'm such a cur as to hear my friends spoken about as you've spoken about some of them to-night, without

kicking against it. You might have seen at first that I didn't like it, but you wouldn't drop it, and so now I mean to give you the real straight tip, and if you don't like it you're at liberty to take it out of me—if you can. Whatever you may suppose, I've as friendly a feeling for Kate Fairfield now as ever I had, and only I know it would have made a talk and done more harm to her than good to me, I'd have knocked your teeth down your throat for speaking about her as you did just now. If I hear of your coming out with any more such talk about her, I'll tell Harry Mason, and if he don't thump you for it I will—or you shall me. It's such cattle as you that ruin girls' characters. But there's another thing—and this is what I came out of the room on purpose to tell you—don't you get talking to any one else about Miss Mason being 'a devilish nice girl,' or me 'picking her up,' or 'putting her through her facings,' or any other slang of that sort. If I hear of you doing anything of the kind you may look out for squalls, so I warn you. I know you'll say I'm a rough for all this, but that won't trouble me; it's a luxury to be a rough sometimes. I wouldn't like to be so that I couldn't pull off my coat to any bragging snob that spoke disrespectfully of a girl to make himself look big."

Charley had spoken with such energy and rapidity, and his attack had been so unexpected,

that up to this point Mr. Parker had been too confounded to say a word, and now he could only stammer out, " You needn't get on such a high horse as all that. I didn't mean any harm about Kate."

" Well, I daresay at the time you only spoke for the sake of bouncing and slanging, but the idea must have been in your mind or it wouldn't have come out, even with drink. The long and short of it is, you're a bad lot ; and now I'm off." So saying, and without touching his drink, or looking whether or not Mr. Parker followed, Charley returned to the dancing-room.

" Only for the sake of bouncing and slanging, eh !" muttered Mr. Parker when left to himself. " Well, no, I'm not such a muff as all that comes to, either. I haven't knocked about among milliners' girls all my life for nothing. It strikes me that if I like to watch and wait—and I can do that—I can get the pull of the whole lot of you ; and if I can, by —— I will, if it's only to crab you, Mr. Bully Thompson."

This quarrel was the only unpleasant incident of the evening, and nothing was known of it save by the two persons concerned. In the dancing-room everything went well, the dance went on, the joy was unconfined, and all went merry as a marriage bell. To Fanny Mason it had, after the first few embarrassing minutes, been a wonderfully happy night. She was up in every

dance, and, though she felt no sense of rivalry, fully shared the honours of the party with Kate Fairfield and Tilly Smith, in regard to the number of applicants whom she had perforce to send empty away. She saw that Charley was very proud of her success, and every time that she passed him she greeted him with telegraphic smiles and nods, intended to convey, as she afterwards explained, that she was "enjoying herself ever so much." When it came to his turn to dance with her she had always a little budget of news to give him about what her partners had said to her, or the compliments they had paid her, these latter being repeated with a certain demure humour, which Charley had always thought one of the pleasantest points in her character. In this vein she told him also of what some of her girl friends had, either accidentally or of malice prepense, "let out" about the relations between her brother and Kate. How they had asked her if the wedding-day was fixed ; who was to be bridesmaid beside herself ; if she was going to take Kate as a partner ; whether the firm would be Mason and Co., or Mason and Sister-in-Law ; and many other things of the same kind, which, as she remarked, *would* have opened her eyes if she hadn't known about Harry's affairs before. "Though, after all, Charley," she said, in conclusion on this topic, "as I told mother, young fellows will get married."

To which Charley replied that he supposed that such was the unfortunate end that most of them came to.

There was no affectation of gush about Fanny, but in her joyous excitement she prattled away in a lively, unrestrained, whatever-come-uppermost style, which Charley at any rate thought very delightful; and as he listened to her voice and noticed the happy, animated expression beaming on her pretty face, he involuntarily locked love into those honest black eyes of hers which so confidingly and undisguisedly looked love to him again.

Indeed, the lovingness of his manner towards her became so marked as to attract the observation of a number of Bentley's young ladies. "That," said one of a group of them, nodding as she spoke towards Charley and Fanny, as they were chatting together previous to the commencement of a dance, "that accounts for Charley taking Kate's dropping him so quietly."

"Perhaps the dropping has been on the other side?" suggested another.

"And perhaps there's been no dropping at all about it," said a third. "At any rate, they all seem to be rowing in the same boat now. They'll be quite a happy family."

"Well," said Tilly Smith, who was among them, "little Dimples is no discredit to Charley; and her good looks are not the best of her,

though her coming out so strong as she's done to-night is a case of 'Who'd have thought it?'"

"At this point the conversation was brought to an end by the partners of some of the speakers coming to take them away.

"And now, I suppose, I needn't mind about crushing the dress a bit, Fan?" said Charley, as he put his arm round her waist on seating himself beside her in the cab in which they were going home from the party, which had come to a close between two and three in the morning.

"Well, it will have to be made up again, anyway," she said, letting her head drop on his shoulder.

"Tired, darling?" he asked, in a low murmuring tone, and kissing her lightly on the cheek as he spoke.

"Just a little," she answered, in the same tone; "though I didn't feel it a bit when I was dancing."

"But you enjoyed yourself, I hope?"

"Oh, so much, Charley. It was good of you to take me; but were you satisfied with how I got on?"

"Oh, hang satisfied!" he exclaimed, flinging his other arm round her and kissing her passionately. "I do love you, Fan, my own darling!"

"Better than anybody else, Charley?" she murmured.

"Better than all the world!"

"And I do you," she whispered, suddenly attempting to burrow in his breast, in her forgetfulness that it was too dark for him to see her blushes.

"I know you do, Fan," he said, pressing her yet more tightly to his heart; "and it's a lot more than I deserve—but then you are such a dear girl."

For a minute or two she lay still on his breast, and then she cooed out, "Well, but don't smother me, Charley—dear!"

"But I will," he said, as he relaxed his hold and raised her head—"with kisses;" and before they got home he nearly carried out his threat.

## CHAPTER VI.

OVER THE RUBICON.

**M**HEN, some year or two ago, a working man in receipt of parochial relief was summoned to one of the metropolitan county courts for the nonpayment of the fees of his daughter's music-master, the case gave rise to a good deal of astonishment and comment, and was made the basis of the philosophizing of sundry social newspaper leaders of the period. But though certainly a striking case in point, the state of things which it illustrated is by no means so phenomenal as people having no personal knowledge of the working and semi-pauper classes would naturally suppose. Such differences in position and appearance of parents and children living under one roof and dependent upon the same resources, though seldom coming under the notice of the outer public, are so frequent as scarcely to attract notice among the classes in which they occur. Any sensationalism that there may be in the circumstance of a father and mother receiving parish relief while their

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daughter is acquiring “accomplishments” will be found to arise rather from the principle (or want of principle) involved than from the rarity of the thing itself. Of my own personal knowledge, I could point out half a dozen such cases within a quarter of a mile of where I live, and even as I write these lines, about twelve o’clock on a wet windy night, I am disturbed by the cab bringing home from her weekly dancing-class the daughter of a sailor’s widow, who lives (and supports her daughter) solely upon public and private charity, in the searching out and obtaining of which she is a most able practitioner.

Who that did not know them would think that that pretty, showily-dressed girl, and that frowsy old woman carrying a couple of black-looking parish loaves, who walk by each other without the slightest token of recognition, were mother and daughter? Yet such is the case, and that unshaven, cowering, round-shouldered man who shrinks on one side when in the evening the same girl, accompanied by her “young gentleman,” passes him, is her father. The young gentleman, perhaps, notices him, but has no idea of his relationship to his young lady, while her fellow-milliners (supposing she belongs to that persuasion), though they may have occasionally heard her speak of her Ma and Pa, have equally little conception of their personality. Either parent would tell you that they knew their place too well to speak to

their daughter in the street, and the daughter would certainly consider herself ill-used were they to do so. It is mostly in the case of girls that such things are done, though sometimes the practice extends to young men. Parents—especially widowed mothers—though wretchedly ill-clad and fed themselves, will, in some instances, be supporting an idle, good-for-nothing son in a state of comparative luxury ; and in these cases the article of non-recognition in public is sternly insisted on—by the son. I once knew a worthy of this type who, while he only bullied his mother—a very hard-working laundress—when he considered her remiss in the matter of supplying him with dress and pocket-money, felt himself so outraged by her once addressing him in public when she had a basket of clothes on her head, that when he got her home he gave her a terrific beating. For this exploit her neighbours sadly wanted her to give him into custody, but she persistently refused to do so, and some technicality preventing the charge of any other person from being effective, he came off clear. Later, when weight of years and overwork compelled his mother to become an inmate of the work-house, this interesting young gentleman went rapidly to the bad, and became lost to the ken of those who had known him in the days when he traded upon the affection of his poor old

parent—but the general opinion among them is that he has *not* been drowned.

At a first glance such relations between parents and children seem very strange, but after a little consideration they can easily be understood.

Under the social circumstances of the parties concerned, they are the necessary result of that combination of vanity, policy, and parental affection with which children, and more particularly daughters, are regarded in all classes of society. Now and again a case of this kind is one of hero worship pure and simple, upon the part of the parents ; but, generally speaking, the elders in such an association are people of highly-genteel proclivities, and exceedingly limited and precarious means, who, having themselves been beaten in the attempt to achieve gentility of position, yet hopefully continue the struggle through their children, for whose equipment and maintenance in the field they are prepared to make any present sacrifice. Match-making and things matrimonial enter greatly into their chances of a campaign. They count upon a pretty daughter securing a well-to-do husband, or a son, if good-looking, captivating a girl with money or connexions worth money ; or, if clever, rising in the world by his own ability. In any of these cases they calculate—though not always correctly—upon sharing in the success to an extent that shall at least recoup them with fair interest for

having found the sinews of war. The fact that they desire to see their children "respected like the lave," and that dress and appearance are nowadays the readiest means of gaining respect, has of course its influence upon their conduct; but the motives referred to above are generally the chief groundwork of their proceedings, and such was the case in the Fairfield family, which was one of those in which the relations between parents and child were of the character of which I have been speaking.

In large towns a girl, though living with her parents, can, if their manner or appearance is such as to militate against her own pretensions to gentility, keep them personally unknown to her acquaintances, but in such places as Stonebury this is not to be done. Most of those who knew Kate knew her parents,—knew them much better than they respected them. Those who did know them usually spoke of them as a rum old couple, and it must be confessed that they were rather eccentric. They were one of those couples who had seen better days, and were always taking or making opportunities of dwelling upon that fact, and lamenting their fallen greatness. It was currently believed that in speaking upon this subject they drew largely upon their imaginations, but at the same time it was known that the general statement was founded on fact. There were plenty of people in

Stonebury who could remember them in their best day when they were a handsome dashing young couple, with a good business and fair prospects of a successful career before them. But the fates, as they said, themselves, as others asserted, had been against them, and they had come sadly down in the world. At the time of their marriage they had been respectively head waiter and barmaid at a large hotel in a neighbouring town. Each of them had a little money, she having economized her wages, perquisites, and presents, while he just at that time had won a considerable sum in a horse-racing speculation. With their joint capital they took an inn and posting business at Stonebury, and for some years all seemed to be going well with them. But their prosperity was only seeming. Fairfield had continued to dabble in betting transactions, and one fine morning shortly after a Derby, it became known that he had smashed, and that his business and all pertaining thereto was to be sold under an execution. Previous to this he had drunk pretty freely, and now he took to drinking as hard and continuously as he could find the means of doing, and it is wonderful to what an extent people so inclined will find means to drink. From this cause he lost several situations as waiter, and, at the same time so lost character that no one would give him regular employment, and he

gradually sank into the drunken, degraded, contemned odd-job man that he was at the time of our story, and had been ever since his daughter could remember. The instinct of the waiter remained strong within him, and from his constantly making use of the phrase, "Shall I step and fetch it, sir?" he had come to be nicknamed "Old Step-and-Fetch-it." Under this title he was known as one of the oddities of the town—one of those unhappy beings whom the cruel and thoughtless make sport of, and others regard with contemptuous pity. In the race week, and at public dinners and the like, the manager of the chief hotel in Stonebury, who had known Fairfield in his better days, would sometimes out of pity, or for lang syne's sake, give him a day or two's work as extra hand ; but his principal employer was old Percy Steperson, who, at the suggestion of his daughter—a suggestion made for Kate's sake, but without her knowledge—gave him work at bill-sticking, circular-distributing, banner-bearing, tent-erecting, and a variety of other things unconnected with the commissariat department, arising in the course of his business as an organizer of *fêtes*. Old Steperson also procured him the situation of attendant to a boat club, a berth in which, though the fixed salary was very small, there was a good deal to be picked up in the way of such perquisites as the remains of cold collations, the cast-off, but

still marketable clothes of the members of the club, and odd coppers, usually "the price of a pint." This was a standard sum with him, and he was constantly seeking the loan (as he put it, though there was no instance upon record of his having repaid it) of that amount from his employers and others. With a drunken cunning he was in the habit of waylaying youths whom he had reason to believe were desirous of standing well with his daughter, and soliciting his favourite loan from them. This, on its coming to Kate's ears, greatly enraged her, whereupon her father held himself up as a modern Lear, and declared that her ingratitude was bringing his *bald* head with sorrow to the grave. During the summer months his earnings were considerable, and his wife, by looking him up pretty sharply and adopting a high-handed policy, managed to secure a larger share of them than might have been expected. In the winter his money-getting occupations were in a great measure gone, and then he chiefly employed himself in haunting public-houses, negotiating loans—either in money or kind—of pints of ale. This was to him the happiest season of the year. In the public-house kitchens he was sometimes allowed to take the position of a Sir Oracle, his reminiscences of the turf—of the "flyers," the splendid jockeyship, magnificent finishes, heavy wagering, and boldly-criminal attempts to command fortune which he

had seen in the brave days of old when he was himself a noble sportsman, and kept the couple of platters (running them in a fictitious name), which had been the chief means of his ruin. His reminiscences and anecdotes upon these subjects were listened to with interest by sportingly-inclined youths of the rising generation. When giving them he would become animated, and look something of his former self, and for the moment the pity with which old Step-and-Fetch-it was regarded would have less of contempt mingled with it than usual, and pints would be given him without solicitation.

At other times he would be trotted out to make sport for the Philistines who "stood" his drink; but happily he was almost unconscious of the fact. Drink had weakened him both physically and mentally. He stooped and shambled in his gait, was dull and apathetic in his manner save when excited by drink, and then he would either whimper over or boast of his former greatness, according as his drink happened to make him maudlin or otherwise. In this respect he was much the same at home—at one time he would be all humility, implicitly obeying his wife and assisting in the housework; at another—generally when he had been doing a profitable day's work, and his wife wanted the money from him—all bombast and fury, loudly asserting that he was the master in the establishment, that he

meant to show that such was the case, and that it would be bad for the health of any one attempting to interfere with the full and absolute exercise of his rights.

But though when made valiant by beer and the temporary possession of a little hard cash, the father claimed to be master of the Fairfield household, it was his wife who really held that position. On her fell the task—and it was no easy one—of keeping the home together, and she had proved herself equal to the work—after a fashion. She could not follow any money-making business, and was not and never had been a managing housewife in the usual sense of the term, but in another sense she was a very managing one. She was an adept in the art of domestic foraging, was great in the twin accomplishments of obtaining credit and delaying, and in some cases evading payment, and she was a scientific borrower. She had a mental inventory of her neighbours' goods and chattels, knew exactly what each one had to lend, who got their coals in by the ton, and would be least likely to remember the occasional loan of a basketful; who were respectively best furnished with saucepans, brooms, washing utensils and materials, and the thousand and one other things which among the poorer classes may be borrowed in a neighbourly way. She knew her neighbours' characters too, was acquainted with their special

weaknesses, and—as an artist—flattered them when on borrowing purpose bent, and by being judicious enough not to come down on any one of them oppressively, she contrived to turn them all to good account.

By the exercise of these talents she had managed, on the very small and uncertain income at her disposal, to keep the household going, and to use her own phrase, “turn Kate out like a lady.” This had been the great object of her ambition, and she had struggled hard, and sacrificed much to achieve it. For years she had done so in simple pride and affection, without the slightest idea of an ulterior object, but as Kate grew up, she had seen in her beauty a means of raising them all out of the slough of poverty into which they had sunk, and from thenceforward her turning Kate out like a lady was associated with that idea. Let it be understood, that her thoughts on this point ran in a perfectly legitimate channel. She would sooner have seen her daughter dead at her feet, than have heard of her “going wrong,” would sooner have begged her bread from door to door, than have lived in luxury at the price of her daughter’s shame. Her idea only meant that the poverty in which she had for years been steeped—the degrading shifts to which she had been put, the mendacious manœuvring with tally-men and petty shopkeepers to which she

had become habituated—had not quite crushed out all romance from her nature. Some remains of her own good looks and the dashing barmaid manner were yet left to her, and she wore Kate's cast-off finery with an attempt at a youthful air. She loved to dwell upon her former standing in society, and she was still as genteel as circumstances would allow. When things were going at all smoothly with her, she would read the penny stories of aristocratic life which Kate brought home, with as much of pleasure and belief as any of the girls through whose hands they had passed ; and finally she believed as honestly as any girl could do in lowly beauty winning a rich, handsome, faultless husband, able and willing to "do something" for lowly beauty's poor relations. When after she had got Kate to Bentley's, she heard of her fame—of her being the *belle par excellence* among Bentley's young ladies, each one of whom was more or less a belle in her own right ; of the gilded youths of Abbotsgate and others being "after her"—she made up her mind that her dream was about to be realized. But here she reckoned without her host, or rather her host did not choose to enlighten her. Kate's pride would not allow her to tell even to her mother that of the "swells" who were spoken of as after her, those of them who were in a position

to marry did not want to marry her, while those of them who would have married were mostly milksoppy youths who were not in a position to marry any one. She would never explain anything of this kind when her mother cautiously broached the subject, but would speak in a carelessly contemptuous way of her admirers, and treat the whole matter with indifference. It was the same when the mother modified her views, and began to think that a leading shopman or a genteel clerk might be a very acceptable husband, and when as time went on she heard of Kate scornfully or pettishly throwing over young men whom she would have considered eligible, and whom she was quite justified in believing Kate might have secured, she became irate and reproachful.

The managing of such a household and such a husband—whose drunkenness increased, and earnings decreased the older he got—as hers was trying work, and when she had found the one hope of relief to which she had looked forward fading away in consequence of what she considered Kate's selfish disregard of family interests, her temper fairly broke down. She took to nagging, and led Kate a terrible life. She was aggressive, and adopted the sidewind system of attack, railing bitterly against "people" gadding about, and carrying on, and getting themselves talked about, "wondering" what some

people thought they were, and whether they supposed that mothers were slaves under them. Wondering further how many dresses, besides their keep, these same people supposed could be got out of eight shillings a week, and opining that they had better lay out their paltry money themselves, and see where they'd be ; then perhaps they wouldn't be quite so high and mighty, wouldn't be quite so ready to turn up their nose at people, who, to say the least of it, were as good as themselves. She seized upon all sorts of occasions for holding forth in this strain, and Kate, who was naturally quick-tempered, and had been a spoilt child, fired up at such treatment, and recrimination became so much the order of the day, that Kate, as more than one of her friends had guessed, became very wretched in and very tired of her home.

It had never been a comfortable home ; Mrs. Fairfield's *forte* was not housewifery, good housewives speaking of her as "one of the dirty dandies." She went about her work in old stuff dresses, which, "lor bless you," as her neighbour Mrs. Brown observed, with a little feminine exaggeration, "would stand up of themselves with the dirt that's in 'em." She had no regular washing or cleaning days, but was constantly muddling about at all sorts of unseasonable times. In her kitchen, the furniture of which consisted of a deal table, which,

for want of regular scouring, had become engrained with dirt and grease, and a few wooden chairs more or less deficient in spars, there were generally to be found two or three days' accumulation of unwashed dishes, while about the floor would be scattered articles of clothing thrown aside to be washed, when the washing of them could be no longer delayed. Her parlour would probably have been in no better condition, but for a large old-fashioned well-sofa, which, with a mahogany table, very shaky on the legs, and a rickety chest of drawers much chipped and dented as to the veneer, and minus a number of handles, formed the principal furniture of the room. The well of the sofa covered a multitude of housekeeping sins. The parlour might be in the wildest confusion when a knock came to the door, but by deftly sweeping all kinds of out of place sundries into the ever-ready well, the apartment could be put into comparative order within the brief space that might decently be allowed to elapse before the door was opened; and it was oftener to a sudden redding up of this kind, than to any regular cleaning, that the parlour was indebted for such a degree of superficial tidiness as was to be found in it. Like most thriftless housewives, Mrs. Fairfield was a great gossip, too; Kate many a time coming home from her work to find no meal prepared, and her mother jangling in some

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neighbour's house. But for such shortcomings as these Kate had not cared much, so long as her mother had striven to make matters pleasant to her in other respects. She had been used to them from her infancy upwards; then she was seldom in the house save at sleeping and meal-times—and, above all, she could keep the exact state of her home affairs a secret from most of those who knew her. Her parents were not of a type that any girl could have been proud of; and, truth to tell, in her inmost heart Kate was scarcely tolerant towards them. She would have concealed her relationship to them if she could, but in Stonebury she couldn't. The undesirable traits in her mother's character were known and talked about, and she knew that every one of her fellow-workers and companions was perfectly aware—though it is due to them to say that, even when quarrelling with her, they never twitted her with it—that the haughty, self-asserting Queen Kate was only the daughter of that disreputable, despicable being, "old Step-and-fetch-it." But if she could not conceal the identity of her parents from her acquaintances, she could keep them from gaining any personal knowledge of the kind of home hers was. She always parted from her male escorts at the field gate already spoken of, and she kept appointments with friends of her own sex, either at their houses or some spot agreed upon between them.

Of course there was a sort of general idea that her home was not likely to be a specially nice one, but still it was generally thought that it was merely on account of the peculiar character of her parents that she studiously avoided inviting any one to it ; and she did all she judiciously could to encourage the belief. From these reasons, mere household matters had given her but little vexation of spirit, but when to practical discomfort was added her mother's nagging and fault-finding, her home became hateful to her, and her one idea was to get away from it.

While, however, Mrs. Fairfield was a decided slattern in a general way, she could, as she phrased it, "come out in style" when she wished ; and on the Sunday afternoon succeeding the quadrille party, it was evident she both wished and intended to do so. The parlour had undergone an extraordinary cleaning-up ; the carpet had been taken up and well beaten and brushed ; a fresh blind and curtain put on the window ; the drawers polished ; the rickety legs of the table so wedged up that its shaky condition was scarcely noticeable, and all undesirable odds and ends thrust into the well of the sofa. The neighbours, too, had been extensively laid under contribution. From one she had borrowed a fine tray, from a second a set of china teacups and saucers, while others had provided respec-

tively a glass cream-jug, sugar-basin, and butter-dish, a set of German silver spoons, and a handsome Britannia metal teapot. These things heaped together on a sideboard, together with some cakes and a couple of saucers of preserves, indicated that it was in the way of a tea that she was going to come out upon this occasion ; the meaning of all the display, as she had in confidence informed each of the neighbours from whom she had borrowed, was that Mr. Mason, Kate's *regular* young man, was coming to tea. To her this was a most important event, an event on which material changes in the family interests might hinge ; and to account for its coming about it will be necessary to go back a little in our story.

To Harry Mason the ball had by no means been the pleasant affair that it had been to his sister. At it he had felt himself eclipsed and neglected. Dancing was not his *forte*, while it was one of Kate's strong points, and finding that he was not able to keep pace with her, she went ahead by herself to an extent that made her oblivious of any consideration as to how his feelings might be affected by her proceedings. Those proceedings being of a kind that put him in the shade before others, and brought the inherent coquetry of her character into strong relief, it need scarcely be said that their effect upon him was not of an agreeable nature. He was

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wounded both in his affection and vanity, though he was too helplessly in love to run the risk of a quarrel by attempting any remonstrance, and too sensible to adopt the sulky form of protest in public. But while he tried to put on a cheerful face he felt thoroughly miserable, and was very glad when the party came to an end. He wished to take Kate home in a cab, but she declined the offer. "I'd rather walk," she said: "my cloak is pretty thick, and the walk will freshen me." This was what she said to Harry, but her true reason was that she wished if possible to avoid waking her parents on her return. She had had a fierce row with her mother before coming out, and she dreaded any renewal of it. During the progress of the ball she had enjoyed a happy forgetfulness of her home-troubles, but at its conclusion they struck chill upon her again, and made her silent and thoughtful as they walked home. Harry, too, was thinking as they went along. All through the night he had felt as though Kate had been slipping from him; but this had only made him the more passionately desirous to cling to her and secure her to himself, and in this frame of mind he speedily came to the conclusion that it behoved him to say something decisive at the very earliest opportunity; and he had scarcely finished the thought when the opportunity offered itself.

They had arranged, with some others, to go  
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for a long walk on the Sunday afternoon, but when they were about to part at the field gateway Kate observed, "I don't think I shall go out on Sunday, Harry ; I feel rather knocked up, and I expect we shall be working late every night for the rest of the week ; but of course that needn't keep you from going."

It was this mention of Sunday that suddenly gave him the chance he wished for. "You know I shouldn't care about going if you weren't with us," he said, getting his arm round her waist ; "but I would like to come down to your place and have a chat with you in the afternoon. May I ?"

She had let her eyes droop while he had been speaking ; but though she could not see the passionate, pleading look in his face, she knew by his low entreating tone with what painful eagerness he waited for her answer, and it was with an evident desire to be kind and soothing that, after a few moments' hesitation, she said, "Well, I'll meet you somewhere, and we can go for a nice quiet stroll by ourselves."

"Oh, let me call for you ! Do, Kate ! Say I may, dear," he pleaded, trying to look into her eyes, which she still kept fixed on the ground. "You must know how very dearly I love you, Kate," he went on, finding that she made no further answer ; "all my happiness lies with you. If you were to play fast and loose with me, or

throw me over, I should never do any good after, and wouldn't care much whether I did or not."

This was of course only a lover's commonplace, but Harry spoke it with heartfelt sincerity, and believed in it—at the time. When he had uttered it he again came to a pause, but Kate continuing silent, he presently exclaimed, "Come, Kate, be kind to me; say I'm to come." For another moment she was still silent, and then suddenly giving herself up to the embrace to which she had hitherto only passively submitted, she exclaimed, with something of passion in her tone, "*You* do love me, Harry?"

"Oh, if I could only tell you how much, darling," he whispered, kissing her; "but I may call on you?"

"Well, if you like."

"If I like!" he echoed, with a joyous smile. "As if I wouldn't like what I've begged for so hard. Really, Kate, I think you take a delight in teasing a fellow; but, for all that, you're the dearest of girls!"

"Well, I must try to be to you," she replied, and then he kissed her again, and in cooing and kissing the interview terminated, Harry going home, feeling inexpressibly triumphant and happy.

But Kate was not so unreservedly happy. Simple as Harry's request might appear if taken literally, it meant a great deal, as she was fully

aware. Among the working classes a young fellow may walk out with a girl, may take her to places of amusement, and be generally attentive to her in public, or in the presence of mutual friends, without any definite engagement being understood, or either party being adjudged guilty of a breach of faith should they enter into an engagement elsewhere. But if in addition to such attentions as these, the young fellow should, with the consent of the girl, call for her at her parents' house when going to take her for a Sunday afternoon's walk, and after the walk return there to tea with her, he is looked upon as having crossed the Rubicon of courtship. From that point he and the girl are regarded as pledged—as “keeping company” with an avowed view to marriage.

Knowing all this, Kate had hesitated about answering. If in love at all, she was not sufficiently so to be regardless of practical considerations. In the pauses of what Harry had fondly imagined to be mere maiden coyness, she had rapidly thought out her position. She had before come to the conclusion that through marriage was her only chance of escape from home, and here was an opportunity. Should she avail herself of it? That was the question she debated. It was by no means so brilliant a chance as she could desire, or had once confidently expected; but now she had sense enough

to know that it was as good or better than most she was likely to get. She had no longer a practical belief in the "noble lover and lowly maiden" doctrine. Of lovers of low degree she did not attempt to conceal from herself that she had felt more of spontaneous love for Charley Thompson or the Frank Hamilton spoken of by Miss Steperson, than she had ever done for the one who stood so lovingly beside her while these thoughts passed through her mind; but the showy actor had passed away she knew not whither, and after what she had seen at the ball she was convinced that Charley would never seek her hand. Those whom she would have preferred to him being beyond her reach, would it not be best for her to secure Harry, whom by a word she could make entirely her own? If she was not exactly in love with him, she argued, she certainly liked him and was proud of him. He was a handsome young fellow, and so genteel and so clever, and so likely to get on; and then he loved her so devotedly and humbly, and would, she felt sure, make her a far happier home than that of her parents. As these thoughts glanced swiftly through her mind her heart went out towards him more warmly than it had ever done before, and, letting her head droop gently on his shoulder, she gave her consent to his calling on the Sunday, knowing that in doing so she virtually committed herself to an engagement

with him. Then she knew that her mother looked favourably upon Harry, respecting whose character and prospects she had made inquiries on it coming to her knowledge that he was after her daughter, and the belief that her being able to say that Harry was to call for her on the Sunday would prevent any further nagging about the ball, had probably exercised a greater influence in forming her decision than she was herself aware of. When at breakfast her mother showed symptoms of an intention to nag by observing "It was a nice time when you got home this morning, my lady," she at once brought forward this point.

"I should have been home earlier, only I stood talking to Harry Mason for a good while," she answered; and then, after a moment's hesitation, added, "he's going to call here for me on Sunday—that is, if you have no objection."

"You might know that I would have no objection," answered the mother, smiling; "I think he's about the nicest young fellow you've ever known, and every one says he's sure to get on in the world.—Did you ask him to come?"

"No! he asked me, and I said he might, but I'm thinking of asking him to stay to tea."

The last observation was made in a questioning tone, and the mother immediately answered, "Oh yes, you ask him, I'll see that he's made

comfortable ; you shan't be made to look small, Kate, never fear."

And so the matter was settled, and Harry went and spent such a delightful afternoon and evening, as only a young fellow in love could. Kate smiled sweetly upon him, her mother was flatteringly attentive and deferential, while the father had been sternly cautioned against obtruding any of his weaknesses, and save his suggesting that perhaps Mr. Mason would like a drop of something short in his tea, his behaviour was all that could have been desired.

Under the influence of his happy excitement and a little skilful drawing out from Mrs. Fairfield, Harry was easily led to speak hopefully and ambitiously of his prospects and intentions in life. As he unfolded his plans before her, Mrs. Fairfield, whose sanguine disposition had been her chief support in her troubles, became firmly convinced that Kate had drawn a prize, and that the good time for the family generally had arrived.

To Harry himself, everything naturally appeared in a rosy hue, and when on taking his departure, Kate saw him to the door, and voluntarily offered him her lips ; his joy was complete, and he went home fully believing that never before had any man been so blessed as he then was.

## CHAPTER VII.

## SANDY'S LITTLE SUPPER.

 F Harry Mason could only have known what was going on elsewhere while he was at Fairfield's, he would have further congratulated himself upon having taken the decisive step just in the nick of time.

While he was putting himself in a position to plead pledged honour against the practical advice which he felt would be offered against his marrying Kate, a plan was being arranged at his own home, with a view to saving him from what those engaged in the consultation conceived to be the disaster of an engagement.

Amid all the excitement of the ball, Fanny had anxiously watched the movements of her brother and Kate, and the result of her observations had been of anything but a reassuring character. She saw the slavishly loving look with which he followed Kate's movements, and the torment he endured at the palpable manner in which she flirted with certain of her partners; and though she took their stabs in Spartan

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fashion, she was painfully alive to every sneer of the needle-drivers about Harry's extra infatuation, and Kate's comparative indifference.

She knew that what the sneerers said was true ; could see that Kate knew and rather ruthlessly exercised her power, and while affecting to consult her lover's wishes, really did as she liked—and it struck Fanny that she liked to do some things that she certainly would not have done had she really loved Harry. These matters greatly troubled her when she came to think things over on the day after the party. She had anything but a high opinion of Kate in a general way, considering her frivolous, thriftless, and unstable ; but in the present state of her own feelings, she had great ideas of the reforming power of love, and before the ball had been prepared to find considerable consolation in the belief that if Kate only loved Harry as she herself loved Charley, her love would enable her to make him a good wife. Now, however, she felt firmly convinced that marriage could only be productive of misery to him, and having a sort of instinctive notion that he as well as Charley had taken some decisive step on the ball night, she felt very unhappy. She was still pondering on this subject, when, about noon, her mother having got her housework "under hand," came up to her work-room for a few minutes' gossip.

"Well, I'm glad you liked the ball, Fan," she said, seating herself, "and after all I don't see that there can be any great harm in going to one now and again in a proper way; no sly work about it, you know. But I dare say you feel pretty well knocked up, eh?"

"Well, just a bit sleepy and stiff; of course I'm not used to it, and I was in every one of the dances."

"And I dare say there were some as thought themselves great at that sort of thing as wasn't."

"I can't say anything about that," said Fanny, laughing, "I only know that I was."

"I suppose some of the girls would be great swells."

"Well, yes, as far as the money would go, you know; and some of them looked very nice too."

"Well, I dare say, Fan, there wasn't many of them there looked better than yourself, though I wasn't there to see. No one had any occasion to be ashamed of you."

"I don't suppose any one was, mother, and what's more, I don't care much whether there was or not, for Charley was the party most concerned, and I know he wasn't, and he showed it before them all, and——" And here she had it on the point of her tongue to tell all that had passed between Charley and her on the way

home, when she was pulled up by a doubt which suddenly occurred to her as to whether it would be quite right to do so without some special permission or instruction from him.

Luckily her mother did not observe her confusion, as she was filled with a design of her own. She had come upstairs with the express intention, as she phrased it to herself, of "getting the drawings out of Fanny about Harry." What she had said hitherto, had merely been with a view to leading up to this; but on her daughter coming to an abrupt pause, she fairly broke ground, by observing, " You've never said a word about Harry, Fan."

" Well, it isn't because I haven't been thinking about him," Fanny answered.

" Oh!" said Mrs. Mason, with a puzzled air, for she was at a loss to understand what particular view of her son's conduct this somewhat enigmatical answer might indicate. " I suppose he was there with that nice my dear of a Kate?" she added, questioningly.

" Oh yes, they were there."

" And you took notice of them?"

" Well, as much as I could do without letting them see it," Fanny said. " And I heard plenty, too; they're pretty well talked about in other places beside the bakehouse, I can tell you."

" Well, I can see you aren't over well pleased with what you've seen and heard," said the mother.

"Do you really think there is anything serious between them?"

"I do, mother," Fanny answered gravely, "and somehow I feel sure now that no good can come of it. I've been turning it over all morning, and I think that for all our sakes we should try if we can't do something to break it off?"

"That's just what I've said all along," rejoined Mrs. Mason, with a shade of triumph in the tone of her voice, "and if I had had my own way, I'd have let both him and her know what I thought of it before now, especially her, the brassy madam. I suppose she was hanging about after him like a hawk all the night?"

"Well, there's no use in me blinding myself, or deceiving you, mother," Fanny answered; "after what I've seen, I think with Charley, that whatever hanging after or forcing there is, is upon Harry's side. Any one that sees them together can tell that he's a great deal fonder of her than she is of him. In fact, those who see them together do see that's how it is, and to tell you the truth some of them rather make fun of it, but it's no fun to us. It makes me feel miserable: if it hadn't been for that I wouldn't have cared, she's a sharp girl, and if she had loved him" . . . engrossed with her subject, she had been about verbally to repeat the illustration of her own love for Charley, but, pulling up she stammeringly substituted, "ever so much—

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you know what I mean, mother—it might have steadied her."

"And it mightn't," sharply retorted Mrs. Mason, waxing wroth. "Harry's a greater fool about her than I even thought he was. It's the way though; those that are the most sensible about other things often make the biggest donkeys of themselves over those dollified sort of girls. But I'll waken him up; he shan't knock his head against the wall without being told of it, and pretty plainly too."

"Well, I don't know, mother," said Fanny, in a deprecating tone; "if you were to begin to storm at him, it would very likely only lead to a quarrel, and to his being obstinate; I was thinking of what Charley said, to get Mr. Grant to speak to him. You know Harry looks to him a good deal for getting on in the club, and the like of that, and would perhaps take advice from him in good part, and of course you could still speak to him afterwards if need be."

To this suggestion Mrs. Mason, after considerable argument, was brought to agree, promising to once more delay the luxury of giving her son a piece of her mind.

Through Charley Thompson, Sandy accepted an invitation "to drop in" at Mason's on the following Sunday afternoon, and then, after due explanation, he was finally persuaded to give "Harry a severe talking-to about his foolishness

to himself, not to speak about anything else."

To this Sandy at first demurred, saying that he objected upon principle to interfere in family affairs, but under Fanny's coaxing solicitation he was speedily induced to make a compromise with his principles.

"Well, I'll just tell you what I'll do," he said, after yielding one or two such general points, as that there might be exceptional cases in which friendly interference in family matters would be both justifiable and beneficial. "I'll ask him and Charley to come and have a bit of supper at my lodgings one night this week, and then we can lead up to the subject as if by accident, and give him as much advice and warning as he's likely to listen to, eh, Charley?"

"Well, yes, I don't see that there could be any better plan," answered Charley, who, both as a friend of the family and the originator of the idea of enlisting Sandy's services, had been invited to the conference; "but you must understand it's you who'll have to be the adviser and do the fatherly and candid. Harry won't stand much from me on that subject, though of course I'll come in chorus now and again, if I see a chance."

Sandy replied that he quite understood that, and merely wished for Charley's company to give an off-handed look to the business, which,

being then regarded as settled so far, was allowed to drop.

When from under Fanny's influence, Sandy by no means relished the part that he had undertaken. Notwithstanding her arguments and his own admissions, he had still a general objection to outside interference in family matters, and in the present instance he feared lest his offering unpalatable advice might lead to such a coolness between Harry and himself as would prevent his visiting the Mason household, and deprive him of the happiness of seeing Fanny.

There was a minor but a very disagreeable difficulty too, as to the management of his landlady, of whose tongue he had a wholesome dread. Mrs. Hanks strongly objected to any extra trouble on a lodger's account, and she was especially down upon Charley Thompson. She knew that he jeered at her addiction to criminal literature, and once when she had dragged his name into some unfounded scandal about one of Bentley's girls, he had addressed her as Mother Brownrigg, called her a murderer of character, and suggested that such women as her should be muzzled. Knowing this, it was in a somewhat apologetical tone that Sandy, on the Monday evening, informed Mrs. Hanks that he was going to have a couple of young fellows to a bit of supper on the Thursday night.

"And I suppose that there Charley Thompson

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—which I could have had the law on him if I liked for the names he's called me—is one of them,” was Mrs. Hanks’ immediate reply, for she was perfectly acquainted with Sandy’s habits and friends.

“ Well, yes,” Sandy admitted, “ he was one, and young Mason was the other.”

“ As to young Mason,” answered Mrs. Hanks, “ I’ve nothing to say against him; he thinks a good deal more of himself than anybody else thinks of him, but that’s no business of mine, and so far as that goes, it’s no business of mine who a lodger has to see him, only I don’t want to deceive you, and so I tell you plump that if that Charley Thompson gets calling me names I’ll let him know what I think about him, and in very plain English, too. The last time he came here after you, his first word to me was, ‘ Well, Madam Tassaud, how are all the murderers getting on?’ But let him do it again, that’s all; as if murders would be put in the papers if they didn’t expect people to read them!”

Sandy knew his landlady well enough to be aware that her tirade was as much directed against the presumption of a lodger in giving extra trouble as it was against Charley Thompson, and so, while he assured her that he would see that the latter was on his best behaviour, he was careful to give her to understand that he would not have had the supper at all, only it was con-

nected with somewhat important business, and would, after all, be a very simple affair—merely chops and potatoes, with whisky-toddy, which Sandy would brew himself, and tobacco to follow. This view of the case, put with due humility, appeased Mrs. Hanks. “As to a little trouble,” she said, “I don’t mind that with a good lodger, which I will say, Mr. Grant, both behind your back and before your face, you are; but I do mind being made game of, and so I thought I’d tell you at first, to save a row.”

Having once consented to the affair, Mrs. Hanks entered into it in a spirit of thoroughness. She personally selected the chops, cooked them with a special carefulness, and insisted upon adding pastry to the meal, which she decided should be taken into the parlour. She laid out the table with all “best” appendages—her best table-cloth, best set of knives and forks, which were usually kept packed away among the household linen, the plated cruet-stand and salt-cellars, which, though capable of use in their legitimate sphere, were practically regarded as sideboard ornaments, and the service of stone china ware which had been the wedding present of the mistress from whose house she had been married. Lastly, she put on her own best dress and manner to receive her lodger’s guests.

Thanks to these exertions upon Mrs. Hanks’  
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part, Charley and Harry found a very neat little spread awaiting them on their arrival at her house, at eight o'clock on the Thursday evening, a circumstance upon which Charley—who had been duly cautioned—took occasion to congratulate her. During the night he found further opportunities of complimenting her upon her cookery and other cognate matters, and succeeded in so far mollifying her that she subsequently admitted that he wasn't altogether a bad sort.

It had been agreed between Sandy and Charley that the subject of Harry's matrimonial views should not be broached until the toddy stage of the supper had been reached, and early in that stage the conversation took a turn which, without any particular manœuvring, led up to the desired topic.

During the supper, Harry had been talking in a very sententious style, and by the time the toddy came on the table, his manner in this respect had become—at least so Charley Thompson thought—perfectly obnoxious. Sandy and Charley smoked pipes, but Harry preferred cigars, a few of which Sandy had also provided.

Puffing one of these, and sipping at his tumbler of toddy with a would-be superb air, which, while it merely amused Sandy, greatly irritated Charley, Harry assumed a lead in the conversation, citing his own opinions as decisive of the matters on

which they were expressed, and, as was his wont, plentifully garnishing his talk with stock quotations more or less altered or paraphrased. After enduring this in silence for a while, Charley began to follow up Harry's quotative observations by such remarks—given in a museum-attendant style—as “Copybook morality, slightly altered;” “Tupper and Water;” “As the sayin' is;” “Our comic column.”

“Now look here, Charley!” at length said Harry, who had remained perfectly cool, and still spoke with a provoking air of superiority, “I dare say you think that's very clever, and I might think so too if I didn't happen to know as well as you do that the idea is not original. It's only a bad adaptation of the mythical story of the man who interrupted the parson by calling out the names of the authors from whom he had stolen his patchwork sermon.”

“And I was applying the notion to your patchwork discourse,” answered Charley. “Of course a fellow can talk in the Sancho Panza style if he likes, but he shouldn't imagine himself an original genius if he does.”

“Well, my dear fellow, without going the length of setting up as an original genius, I think I may say that I know more about this sort of thing than you do,” said Harry, in the same provoking tone, “and whatever may be your opinion, you may depend upon it that apt

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quotation is one of the chief graces, alike of conversation and oratory.”

“ Well, in moderation I suppose it is,” assented Charley; “ but quotations may be used immoderately. They may be hackneyed as well as apt too, and may be purposely talked up to, and dragged in one on top of another just to show a speaker’s powers of quoting, in which case they are more in the nature of commonplace truisms than of the forcible illustrations they may originally have been. And now, my dear fellow,” concluded Thompson, imitating Harry’s manner, “ if you *do* know more about that sort of thing than me, I think I may say that I know a little more than you about some other sorts of things that are perhaps of more importance. You may take my word for it that you place a good deal more reliance on stock phrases and gab generally than will be good for you, if you don’t take care.”

“ I don’t quite take; how do you mean?” asked Harry, in an offensively jaunty tone.

“ Well, I’ll tell you; I suppose it’s no secret to present company that you intend to get out of the shop if possible, and that you look to the union leader, working-man’s-friend sort of business, as a means of doing so.”

“ Well, suppose I did; what then?”

“ I wont suppose anything at all on that point, I know you do, and it’s a perfectly legitimate ambition. But it’s a thing that’s not to be

done by talk alone, or even principally ; eh, Sandy ?”

“ Well, no,” said Sandy, speaking in a slow deliberative way ; “ to be able to speak well is a fine thing certainly, and a lot of well-directed talk about the real creators of wealth, the rights of labour, the tyranny of capital, and so forth, has still its effect ; but unions are not led, or the working classes ruled, from the platform. Popular leadership is essentially a wire-pulling business, and the wires are worked behind the scenes, often very crookedly worked too. I wont argue that some men may not honestly satisfy their conscience by an application of the argument, that the end justifies the means ; but I do believe that no working man can rise to be a popular leader of his class or any considerable section of it, unless he first cringes to the lesser educated mass of them. He must in the present state of education pander to their prejudices before he can gain sufficient influence with them to direct them even for their own good.”

“ Well, of course, Sandy, one can’t expect to find a Utopian state of goodness among working men any more than among others,” answered Harry ; “ if you want to lead them you must stroke them the right way of the fur ?”

“ Yes, if you want to lead them for your own advantage,” said Sandy ; “ and that confirms what I have just been saying ; those who have

to live by leading them must stroke them the right way, even when stroking them the wrong way may be necessary to the removal of some canker, or the achievement of some great ultimate good."

"Do you intend to argue, then, that working-class leaders, risen from the class, never do any good?" questioned Harry.

"Oh no; not quite that," answered Sandy. "Sometimes their doing good to their class, and doing themselves a service, or at any rate no harm, goes together. But still it is a necessity of their position that they must do good more slowly, and allow of a larger admixture of evil with the good, than more independent leaders would do. At the same time, in any great movement affecting the working classes, they can give information and guidance upon points on which those who have never been inside the class would be at fault."

"Oh, they are of some use then," said Harry, with an evident inclination to sneer.

"It'll be a long while before you'll find them of any to you, though," said Charley; "you talk about stroking the people the right way of the fur, but you'll find the great union men and their stamp are all bristles, and all wrong way. They're death on any one that they think wants to have a finger in their pie; and with them against you, you'll have a tremendously up-

hill fight of it before you can place yourself in a position to show them that you may perhaps be able to smash the pie if they don't let you share the plums ; and till you can place yourself in such a position you needn't think of fingering the plums, I can tell you."

" Oh, I quite understand that I would have to fight my way up against opposition from above and envy from below."

" You would, my boy, and in the fight you'd have to do more than talk ; you'd have to do a good deal of oracle working, occasionally of a kind that some men wouldn't think altogether nice."

" And above all, Harry," said Sandy, darting a meaning look at Charley under cover of the movement of rising to ladle out more toddy—" above all, to succeed in such a fight you should be untrammelled."

" How untrammelled ?" he asked.

" Well, in a word," said Charley, taking a long sip at his glass, " unmarried."

Hitherto Mason had been thoroughly cool, not to say flippant in his manner, but now he changed colour and hesitated, and there was a perceptible shake in his voice as he answered—

" I don't see what that has got to do with it."

" Ah ; but it has got a great deal to do with it, Harry," said Sandy ; " marriage alters a young man's position very materially."

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"Especially some marriages," put in Charley ; "and in your case it would have everything to do with it."

"Why in my case particularly?"

"Well, from all I hear, for you to be married, would mean to be married to Kate Fairfield, and\_\_\_\_"

"And what of that?" interrupted Harry ; "have you anything to say against her?"

"Oh no ; Kate and I are friends. I wouldn't speak *against* her, even if I knew anything ; which I don't. What I've got to say *about* her I've said to herself, and, as far as that goes, to yourself ; she's not cut out for a working man's wife, and it'll be a bad job for herself, as well as her husband, if she marries one."

"Well, I should fancy it would be if she married some working men—of course you speak quite disinterestedly—you don't want her?"

"No, I don't."

"Nor ever did, I suppose?"

"Well, I hardly know about that," said Charley, slowly ; "when I first knew her, I used to often wish that I was something better than a working man. However, that doesn't matter, I don't want her now, and you do, and about as bad a thing as can happen to you will be to get what you want. If you do, you may certainly bid fare-

well to any idea of going ahead in the line of life we were talking of just now."

"That may be your opinion," replied Harry, "but I hold the more general belief, that a wife that he loves is a spur to action and ambition with any man who is a man."

"That's as may be," said Charley ; "but I fancy a fellow is all the better for a few years' clear run without any such spurring. What you've just said is all very fine on paper, and to people that are spoony ; I know all about it, I've been that way myself often enough—'with your love to urge me on, your welfare to work for, I feel that I could carve my way,' &c. And with your arm round a pretty girl, you feel and believe it all ; I can sympathize with you so far, but at the same time, you may depend upon it that in practice that sort of thing is a particularly risky experiment; what do you say, Sandy?"

"Well, yes, if an ambitiously-inclined young fellow marries with those ideas, he generally finds that he has got a burden as well as a spur, and that, while the spur goes too deep to be pleasant, the burden prevents him from attaining the goal he may have set himself. It just comes to this, Harry, if a young fellow in our rank of life is content with the prospect of being a commonplace workman all his days, and believes

that the companionship for life of a certain girl will more than repay him for foregoing the advantages which a few years free knocking about in the world are fairly calculated to give him, then he may marry and be happy. But for a working man who wishes to see the world and get on in it, and has only his own energies to depend upon for doing so, a too early marriage—a marriage at your age, say—is, as a rule, a clog upon those energies."

"I don't see that it should necessarily be so," said Harry, argumentatively.

"You won't see it," said Charley. "Of course it's no particular business of mine, but I happen to know that you are very sweet upon Kate; but still that's no reason why you should want to marry her all in a hurry. You are both young, and if she's prepared to marry you at all, and thinks as much of you as in that case she should do, why then she would willingly wait a few years for you, if she knew that it was for your good she should do so, and as to yourself——"

"As to myself," broke in Harry, with an impatiently contemptuous shake of the head, "I don't believe in your long, cold-blooded engagements."

Charley looked at him for a few moments, and then speaking more softly than he had hitherto done, said, "You don't believe in Kate's waiting

for you, that's it, Harry; and if there's good reason for your want of faith, I'm sorry for you, that's all."

Harry was about to make some angry rejoinder, when Sandy interposed—"Look here, Harry," he said, "Charley and I have a motive in discoursing as we have done, and your own sense ought to tell you that we can only have your good in view in the matter. Like others, I have heard that you are courting this girl very strongly, and that it wont be your fault if you are not married to her soon, and as your friend, I want to advise you against any such proceeding—to withdraw from the affair altogether before it goes too far, or at any rate postpone any question of marriage for some considerable time. How your marrying just now would affect your personal prospects has been discussed, but there is another view of the case—your position towards your mother. Of course you have a legal right to marry who and when you like, but looking at all your mother has done for you, don't you think you are morally bound to do something towards repaying her for all her goodness before leaving her to take the responsibilities of a married life upon yourself. Not that I think she would wish to keep you back a moment, if she thought that this marriage—which from your manner, I take it you *do* contemplate—would be for your benefit, but she

doesn't, and I don't know any one that knows both you and the girl that does. Charley is not alone in his opinion that she is not cut out for a working-man's wife, and even if she is you ought to wait for a while. I don't want to hurt your feelings, or to interfere unnecessarily, Harry, but you should think seriously of all this, and what others will be likely to think of it."

There was a brief silence at the conclusion of Sandy's speech, and then Harry abruptly asked, "Do you know her, Sandy?"

"Not personally, but I think I know the style of girl she is."

"Ah, but if you'd once been in her company, Sandy, I believe you would excuse if I was to say with your favourite Burns—

'O wha can prudence think upon,  
And sic a lassie by him?  
O wha can prudence think upon,  
And sae in love as I am?'

But I don't want to avail myself of that line of defence. I may as well confess that I *have* courted her strongly, and," he added, glancing at Charley, "successfully. What's more, I've courted her so far that I couldn't honourably draw back now, even if I wished, which I don't—but at the same time, I've not been utterly thoughtless in the matter, as you seem to think.

I *have* thought of my mother. If she had been really dependent upon me, I might have acted differently, though even if I was married she could always share a home with me if she needed it. As it is, however, Fanny's business supports them both, and leaves something over, so that——”

“There!” broke in Charley, bringing his fist down on the table, “I've been expecting that. I knew thundering well that you'd be setting Fanny down as lion's provider. She must keep her mother, and help you and your wife, that's about your programme. She's a girl in a million to have done what she has already for you, and now you'd impose upon her further—you're no man, but I'm d—d if Fan shall do it if I can prevent it!”

During this outburst, and for some moments after it, Harry Mason sat speechless from astonishment and rage; but at length, recovering himself sufficiently to speak, he sprang from his chair, exclaiming, “If you can prevent it! And pray who the devil gave you any right to interfere in our family affairs? But I begin to understand now; I see how much your tremendous virtue is worth. It isn't that Fan must not be a lion's provider—but she mustn't be any one else's but yours. I see now what brings you about our house so much. You want to get hold of Fan and her business and little savings for yourself,

do you? But you shan't if *I* can prevent, and I think I can!"

"Why, you," Charley was beginning, when Sandy interposed.

"Come, drop it, both of you," he said; "there's no good to be got by losing your temper."

"Well, I think I've had enough to make me lose mine," said Harry; "at any rate, I've stood quite as much badgering and bullying as I care about for one night, and so I shall go." And Sandy, offering no opposition, he went.

"My faith, Charley, you did more than a chorus part to-night," said Sandy, as soon as they were alone.

"Oh, that would-be-lordly air of his always draws me out," said Charley, smiling.

"I suppose neither you nor I need go to his place again?" said Sandy, questioningly.

"Oh, I don't know," answered Charley, "without the beast comes to first I wont go; but it's his mother's establishment, and unless she had forbidden me the house, or shown me the cold shoulder, I should go if I wanted."

"Well, I hope that his mother will be able to do more good with him in this love business than we have been."

"His mother!" laughed Charley. "Well, I dare say she'll storm when she first gets loose at him. But, bless you, he knows the right way of

*her* fur to a nicety ; he can do what he likes with her and Fan. It's evident he means having his own way ; and if it wasn't for those concerned in him, he might go to the devil for what I cared. But I can see you are thinking of the danger of losing morning quarters, and so I'll be off."

## CHAPTER VIII.

## HARRY STOOPS AND CONQUERS.

 N the departure at eight o'clock of the one or two hands who assisted her in her business, Fanny Mason, with a view to economizing coal, would put out her work-room fire, and, taking some specially-reserved piece of hand-sewing with her, would continue her own labours by the kitchen fireside. By that time her mother was at leisure, and they would chat over things in general, or discuss family affairs ; and on the night of Sandy's little supper their conversation naturally turned upon that event. Fanny commenced by "wondering how Harry was getting on."

"Well, I hope he'll enjoy his supper," said Mrs. Mason, who seemed disposed to take a sardonically humorous view of the subject ; "but I'm afraid he'll hardly relish the sauce he'll get with it. Advice that goes against the grain ain't pleasant to any one, and it's like poison to conceited people, and I can see now, Fan, that Harry *is* conceited."

"Well, I don't suppose he'll say that he's wrong, even if he sees it," Fanny admitted ; "but still if he did see it, I should say he'd have sense enough to draw back quietly."

"Ah, but if he's as struck about this precious beauty of his as you say, he wont see it," said the mother, emphatically ; "and we're to blame for that as well as him. We've spoilt him, and let him have his own way so much that now he can't bear to be crossed ; but he's likely to be crossed, and very sharply too, for all that. If he takes Mr. Grant's advice, well and good ; but if he doesn't—and I don't think he will—I shall let him know what I think."

"Well, I do hope you wont quarrel with him," said Fanny ; "that wont mend the matter. If it comes to the push, he can do as he wishes ; and I wouldn't like for there to be any unfriendliness amongst us. If I thought it would be for his own good, I'm sure I would rather help him to marry her than try to hinder him."

"I know you would, Fan ; and, as far as that goes, so would I. But it isn't for his good, and Charley says nor for hers either. But, independent of that, right is right, when all is said and done. If he doesn't see that he owes something to you and me before he thinks of getting married, why then he ought to be told, and whatever you may say, I mean to tell him."

"Not if he *does* take Mr. Grant's advice?"

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"Oh no! Not at all, unless I can't help it. Don't think I want to do it."

Here there was a lengthened pause in the conversation, which was broken by Fanny exclaiming, "Oh dear, I'm afraid he'll guess that it was us that set them on to talk to him. He will go on if he does."

"Ah, but he mustn't," said Mrs. Mason. "I've been thinking it all over, and I just won't stand any of his highty-tighty work about this business. If it comes to the push, as you talk about, this is my house, and I mean to let him know it if needs be."

Fanny's fears were well founded. Her brother did guess who had set his mates upon him. He flung out of Sandy's in a fuming passion. He was enraged at the manner in which the business of a popular leader had been commented upon; still more enraged at the manner in which Kate had been spoken of; but most of all enraged at having been, as he put it to himself, made to look small—at having been lectured at all, and especially lectured by Charley Thompson, a fellow whom he regarded as much inferior to himself.

"If it had only been old Sandy, I wouldn't have cared so much," he muttered; "though I can't see what reason either of them had to interfere in my private affairs."

It was at this point that the light broke upon

him. It flashed through his mind that Sandy was too discreet, and Charley too careless, to have interfered in so special and pointed a manner, unless there had been some cause more than mere personal interest for their doing so ; and remembering that they had been at his mother's on the Sunday, he at once jumped to the conclusion that it was she and Fanny who had induced them to lecture him. In the mood he was in this idea rather pleased him. He wanted some one to vent his anger upon, and he mentally vowed that he would " teach them not to put fellows on to lecture him again ;" and bracing himself in this determination he arrived at home.

When Harry and Charley went out together, the latter invariably went into the house for a few minutes, if they returned while the women were still up : and when Harry went in upon this occasion, Fanny, looking up from her work, asked, in a tone of surprise—

" Where's Charley ?"

" At the devil for what I care," he answered, flinging his hat upon the table. " We've had a good deal too much of Charley here," he went on, taking up his stand with his back to the fire, " but just let me tell you, it's done with now ! "

" Why, what do you mean ?—what do you look at me so savagely for ?" asked Fanny, with a dismayed look.

"Oh, I suppose you take me for a fool like the rest," he sneered; "and I almost deserve it for not having seen through this before; but fool or not fool, I know now what brings him here, and the meaning of your anxious 'Where's Charley?' I know mother and you think him a tremendously fine fellow; but you made a mistake when you put him on to lecture me. You might have chosen a fitter instrument than him for your underhand work; a blackguard like him, that will be raking about the country all his life, is a pretty character to advise any steadily inclined young fellow against getting married, I must say."

Any bullying of herself Fanny would probably have stood meekly, but this abuse of her hero roused her indignation and overcame her reserve. Looking up from her work with flushed face and flashing eyes, she answered defiantly—

"He's not a blackguard, our Harry; and you know you daren't call him one to his face."

Anything like a spirited retort from his sister was so unusual a thing, that for a moment Harry stood speechless with surprise, and then thrusting his hands into the waistband of his trousers, and drawing a long breath, he exclaimed—

"Holloa! he hasn't been making love to you for nothing then; muscular Christianity is catching, is it? But great fire-eater as you think

him, I've told him to his face what I think about this matter, any way; and now I tell you the same. He's not to come here any more after you, and if I had known before that it was after you that he came, he should not have come at all. A fellow like him, that has no intention of settling, and may be here to-day, and God knows where to-morrow, has no more right to be making up to a respectable girl than he has to obtrude his notions about marriage upon a steady young fellow."

" You're only going on against him because he's been telling you what a fool you're making of yourself with Kate Fairfield," answered Fanny, in the same defiant tone.

" Oh, that was the line he was to take, was it? Well, perhaps you'll be glad to hear that he bettered his instruction. He put it that I was going to make a knave as well as a fool of myself—that I meant to rob you. But there he showed the cloven foot; if he does mean anything serious about you it's with an eye to your business and any bit of money you may have. But I told him I'd put a stopper on that. After the way in which he's interfered in our affairs I'll take particular notice he doesn't come into this house again."

" Well, Harry, I think I've given you about rope enough, and now I've got a word to say," observed Mrs. Mason, in a quiet but emphatic

tone, and with an expression on her face such as her son had never seen on it before, and by no means liked now that he did see it. "Before you talk of stopping people coming here, you should ask what I think about it. This is my house, not yours ; and while you may have your fair say as to who is to come to it, Fanny and I must have ours, and mine must be the biggest say of the lot ; and I say Charley Thompson shall come here if he likes ; and if any one tries to insult him when he is here, them and me will quarrel—badly. Charley is a bit wild sometimes, I daresay, he has faults like other people, but he's a good-hearted fellow at bottom, as no one ought to know better than you. What may be between him and Fan I don't profess to know ; but if he's after her, I'll be bound to say he wont do anything dishonourable. As to his not wanting to marry till he's seen the world a bit, and has an idea of how he's to be settled, I give him credit for that ; and as Fan says, it's only because he's been advising you against doing so that you are going on about him. But you needn't saddle it all on him. I don't suppose he'd have troubled himself in the matter if we hadn't asked him ; and though I wasn't there, I'll wager he didn't say anything about this beauty of yours that I wouldn't have said more plainly. If ever there was a girl born to ruin a working man, she's the one ; and bad as she is, she's not all.

Whoever marries her will have that precious mother and father of hers dragging at him, and then goodness help him ! You think you've been doing it mighty sly, but we've known all about it for a good while. Just this very afternoon I've been told of your going to tea at their house on Sunday, and of her mother going about borrowing of everybody to do the grand before you. That's the way they will do, too, till they've got you fast, and then you'll see the other side of them ; then you'll see your doll with the gilt off, and your mother-in-law will borrow from you instead of for you. I know how them sort of people turn out ; and so will you, to your sorrow, if you wont be advised. However, let me tell you one thing, you can go to her mother's to tea if you like, but you shan't bring her here ; if I can't hinder you from ruining yourself, I wont help you to do it."

Several times in the course of her tirade Mrs. Mason had paused, expecting some reply, but Harry had remained profoundly silent throughout. The turn events had taken had been too much for him. The humiliation which he considered had been put upon him at supper had been utterly unexpected ; and lo ! when he had calculated upon avenging it on his mother and sister, they had turned and rent him. His mother, so far from being withered by his sneers or overcome by his reproaches, having severely snubbed him,

and spoken with contemptuous despite of the lady of his love. Such a turning of the tables would have been very disconcerting under any circumstances, and, in connexion with his love affairs, it completely unhinged him, causing anger to give way to alarm. The last words of his mother conveyed a threat that to him was a dire one. According to the etiquette of courtship existing among his class, a matrimonial engagement was not considered irretrievably ratified until the girl in her turn had been (when the thing was practicable) favourably received at Sunday afternoon tea by the parents of her lover. A girl very much in love might not have insisted upon this point, might have contented herself with the reflection that parents sometimes had very curious notions about such matters, and that after all it was the son who did, and not the parents who did not, care for her, whom she was going to marry. But despite all his egotism, Harry, whenever he fairly faced the subject, felt that Kate was not very much in love, that she had yielded to importunity and the force of passing circumstances rather than to any strong affection such as would scorn at formalities. He felt that she would consider that if there had been any condescension in the matter it had been upon her part, and if she once got an inkling that his mother objected to do her honour, she would break the engagement, and for him—so

he honestly believed at the moment—all light would be gone from the world.

These thoughts, as they rushed through his mind, struck chill upon him and made him pause. He saw that upon this subject, at any rate, he had got to the end of his tether in the masterful line, and that if he was to conquer at all it must be by a policy of conciliation, and with a view to gaining time to arrange such a policy, he answered, "Well, mother, I think we'd better not talk any more just now, or some of us might say things we would be sorry for afterwards. I know I was in an ill temper when I came home, and I daresay I've said things I oughtn't to have done, and really didn't mean, and if I did, I'm very sorry for it."

"And I'm sorry that I snapped you up when you were put out," said Fanny; "but you know, Harry, you shouldn't have gone on against Charley so. It was our fault, his talking to you."

"And you know, Fan, you shouldn't have gone on so about Kate," laughingly answered Harry, imitating the coaxing tone in which the latter part of his sister's speech had been spoken.

"Well, we shouldn't, and that's the truth," said Mrs. Mason, whom her son's submission had immediately softened. "We shouldn't have called her hard names, and I wouldn't have done

it only I was vexed. But all the same, Harry, my lad, she's not cut out for you, as you'd see yourself, if you would just try and have a look at it in an old people's way. Marriage is a job for life, you must remember ; and if it's to be a happy one you must take a long look ahead, before starting of it. As Mr. Grant said the other night—and I daresay you'll understand it better than me, though I knew what he meant—marriage is one of those contract jobs for which a man shouldn't even tender till he's made detailed working drawings in his mind, and honestly satisfied himself that he is justified in undertaking it."

"Oh, I quite understand that, mother."

"Not quite, I think, Harry ; there's two sides to a working man's marriage—a sugary side, as one may say, and a plain bread-and-butter side ; and it's only along the sugary side that you've taken your look ahead. This Kate, as I hear, is very good-looking and dresses dashingly, and other girls envy her, and the young fellows go after her, and are jealous of you : and you're in love with her, and proud of being first man with her, and she'd be the wife of your heart, and you'd live long and die happy ; that's how you see things on the sugary side."

"Well, I must confess that's about how things strike me," said Harry, smiling.

"Ah! but then there's the other side, Harry.

Would she be the wife of your home? Would she be the wife to keep your house and herself and you and your children comfortable on a working man's wages? The wife to have your meals ready regularly, to do a hard day's washing every week without thinking herself lowered and imposed upon, and always have a cheerful fireside for you in the evening? The wife not to hanker after showy dress, which your income wouldn't afford? Not to run you into debt unbeknown to you, and not get mixing herself up in all sorts of gossip and jangle as some wives do? Would she be a wife like this? that's the question you'd have asked yourself if you'd looked on the plain bread-and-butter side."

"Well, of course all that should be considered," said Harry, with an air of serious candour intended to convey that he had been much struck with what his mother had just said.

"That it should, Harry," she answered; "and that isn't quite all, either. One might go a bit further, and say that there was a dry-crust side to the question. You know how women have to pinch and push and scrape to keep a house together when hard times come, and men fall out of work. Women must knuckle down then, Harry, and no mistake; they must do things that go sadly against the grain. Things that people that never have had to do them say they never would do—though I say that if a woman has

got a good husband, and cares for him and her children as much as she ought to do, she'll put her pride in her pocket, to serve them in a time of trouble. But then every woman doesn't think so ; and there's some that don't care as much about their husbands as they ought. And what you should ask yourself is, how this girl that you're thinking of would act under such circumstances. Would she be likely to pull you through, or would she give way and become a spiritless sloven on your hands ; or worse still, Harry—for I mean to be plain with you—would her pride and love of dress lead to her going to the bad by herself rather than sharing hardships and poverty with you, if you did happen to fall upon hard times?"

" Well, come, mother, I'll speak plainly too. I don't think it's right of you to speak of the girl like that," said Harry, once more speaking in a somewhat angry tone.

" Oh, I didn't mean it that way, Harry ; God forbid that I should try to take her character away. I was only speaking generally ; because I have known cases in which proud, dressy young wives have gone wrong rather than come down in the world before those who knew them. All I want you to do is, to look carefully at all sides of the question, and consider whether this girl is fit to be a working man's wife before you ask her to be one. Beauty is a very nice thing

in its way, and if you can get it as well as other good qualities, so much the better; but you may depend upon it, a loving heart and a ready, willing pair of hands are the greatest beauties in a working-man's wife. They are far before a pretty face—they last longer, are more profitable, and less troublesome, and you never tire of them."

"Well, I believe that in a wife, it is handsome is that handsome does, but at the same time I suppose you'll allow, mother, that a pretty-faced girl may have these other beauties."

"Oh yes, but I'm pretty certain the particular pretty-faced girl we've been speaking of hasn't, and that's why I've spoke. I only wish for your good, Harry, and I wouldn't try to stand between you and her for a moment if I thought it would be for your happiness to have her; but I feel sure that it wouldn't—nor for hers."

"Ah! well, mother," said Harry, who was anxious to bring the conversation to an end, lest it should chance to drift into the shape of an angry altercation again—"ah! well, since we've been talking calmly, I will say that you've given me a good deal to reflect about, and now I think I'll get to bed and sleep upon it."

Acting on this hint, Fanny brought him his candle, and he went upstairs smiling, while his mother and sister were also in a much more self-satisfied mood than they had been when he came in.

Each party considered they had been victors in the strife, Mrs. Mason and Fanny expressed a belief that they had brought him to his senses, and that now he would be prepared to listen to reason. Harry, on the other hand, believed that in the softened tone his mother and sister had taken in the latter part of the discussion, he saw a sure path to having his own way.

He did listen to reason, but it was his own. He reasoned that the objections of his mother and sister were to be attributed to personal prejudice against Kate ; pique at his not having consulted them about his courtship ; and a participation in that general belief of mothers and sisters, that no girl is good enough for a favourite son and brother. He smiled at what he conceived to be their weakness, and supposed that he would just have to humour them a bit. "I mistook my line at first, though," he thought. "It seems it wont do to try the high and mighty style over this ; but I can stoop to conquer, I can do the conciliatory and ostensibly submissive for Kate's sake." Of his yet being able to manage the women he felt no doubt, though if he had thoroughly probed his own mind, he would probably have found that his faith was founded less upon his confidence in his diplomatic powers, than on the intuitive knowledge that they loved him too much to be able to stand by long and see him miserable : and that he would be utterly

miserable if separated from Kate, he made no question. Concerning the management of the men, however, he again felt sorely troubled. If they considered that by getting married he was breaking an implied understanding, and were "down on him" in consequence, it would interfere materially with his prospects. Their resentment would certainly retard his progress in the career he proposed to himself, or perhaps might lead to his having to leave the shop ; and if a knowledge of this came to Kate's ears, might she not take it for a ground to break off the engagement. It was a difficult matter to deal with, and he considered it anxiously, until he at length came to the somewhat reassuring conclusion that "it might be worked." If Sandy and Charley had spoken spontaneously, he thought the case would have been hopeless, but then they hadn't. They had taken no interest in the affair till they had been set on by the women, and the general body of the men would perhaps take little notice at all of his marrying if left to themselves. Any way, it would be all right if he could get Sandy and Charley on his side in the question, and that he thought he could manage. If they had gone out of their way for the women once, they would be likely to do so again, and when he had got his mother and Fanny to consent to his marriage they would get Sandy and Charley to side with them again, and those two in their turn would

stand between him and his shopmates, among whom they, to a great extent, led opinion—Sandy with the elderly and middle-aged, and Charley with the younger men.

"If Charley really was sweet upon Fanny," his musings ran on, "he was just the sort of fellow to do anything in a reasonable way to oblige her. But Sandy! how about him, could it be that he was after his mother?" he muttered. It was a laughable idea, certainly, but still more unlikely things had happened. True, she was older than him, but she was a plump, healthy, good-looking woman, who had carried her years and troubles lightly, so far as personal appearance was concerned. But no! on reflection there was no ground for that supposition, and yet—and yet—and here, after a brief pause, the true state of the case suddenly rushed in upon him. "By Jove," he exclaimed, in an undertone, "I see it now; he's sweet on Fan, too. Why, she's turning out to be a regular little charmer. Well, so much the better for me; I know I can always get her to do anything I want." He had been gradually regaining his usual egotistical equanimity as things began to look brighter, and having arrived at the satisfactory point just indicated, he concluded his musings by murmuring with a complacent air—"Well, I begin to think it's about literally true that the course of true love never does run smooth, but I believe I shall be able to

clear mine for all that ;" and comforted by this belief he at length turned in and "slept on it."

The next day he began to carry out his policy of conciliation by apologizing to Sandy and Charley for his warmth on the previous evening, and inviting them to his mother's house. He asked Sandy to come to tea on the next Sunday, saying that he would never hear the last of it from his sister until, by a friendly visit from him, she was satisfied that they were friends again. Sandy, who had been looking upon himself as a banished man, joyfully accepted the invitation ; while Charley, acting on Harry's suggestion, looked in for a few minutes that evening. Knowing the ways of the Mason household, he generally managed to drop in when Fanny was alone, and he did so on this occasion.

"Oh, I'm glad you've come, Charley," she said, rising to meet him.

"Why, aren't you always glad, Fan?" he said, laying his hand on her shoulder, and looking down into her eyes.

"Well, yes," she answered, blushing ; "but I'm particularly so to-night, because it shows that Harry and you are friends."

"Ah, but I might come here if we weren't," he answered, smiling ; "case of can't help it, you know, Fan," and as he spoke, he slid his arm from her shoulder round her neck, and raising her head, kissed her.

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"You could have helped that, though, my gentleman," she said, seating herself, as he released her.

"I couldn't though; not if I had been to be hanged for it," he answered, taking up his favourite position behind her chair.

"Well but, Charley, I suppose Harry and you are friends."

"Friends! of course we are."

"Ah! but I expect he went on to you at a pretty rate last night, and I was vexed about it."

"Well, as to that, Fan, almost any fellow would have rode rusty if they'd been talked to as he was. I know that I would; but hard words break no bones, and neither of us bear malice."

"Mother tackled him after he came home," said Fanny, after a pause.

"And how did they get on?"

"Well, at first I thought they were going to have a regular fall out, but they both got cooler after a while, and then he was pretty reasonable; I think he'll be persuaded now."

"Do you?"

"Yes! Don't you?"

"Well, hardly."

"Why not?"

"Well, there's no mistake about his being in

love, and when a fellow's that way, he's not very easily persuaded."

"He said he'd think about what mother said."

"When engineers can't get through an obstacle, Fan, do you know what they do?" Charley asked.

"No; what do they?" she questioned, looking at him with a surprised air.

"They work round it."

"Do you mean to say you think he'll try to work round mother?" she asked.

"I'd sooner think that," he answered, "than that he'd give up Kate the first time of asking."

As we have seen, Harry had determined to work round both his mother and sister, and though he carried on his operations cautiously, he continued them perseveringly. He let them see that he was unhappy, and while, whenever Kate's name was brought up—and it was part of his plan to see that it was brought up pretty frequently—he listened to what they had to say with great apparent submissiveness and candour, he skilfully maintained her cause. Making the most of the point conceded by his opponents, that they did not object to his marrying in the abstract, he bent all his energies to showing, or rather implying, that despite appearances to the contrary, Kate was a fit and proper person to be a working-man's wife, and that with her only he could be happy.

Fanny was soon vanquished. Despite the faults she had recently discovered in her brother's character, she loved him still with an undiminished love. Then, however doubtful she might be about Kate, she could see that Harry really loved her; and judging, by her own feelings for Charley, how hard it must be to give up one so loved, she withdrew her at no time very determined opposition, and tried to take a hopeful view of the affair.

Though she held out more sternly than her daughter, Mrs. Mason at length also gave way on the first of Harry's great points. Her love for him pleaded in his favour; and another thing which had considerable weight with her—though she was not aware of it—was his arguing the matter with her at all. She had not hit upon the key to his proceedings—namely, the immense importance he attached to Kate's being received by her and Fanny. She knew that her declining to have Kate at her house would be an unmistakable intimation to that young lady that she did not approve of her son's marrying her; but it had never struck her that her taking that method of showing her disapproval of the match might be sufficient to break it off. Notwithstanding all that Charley and Fanny had said to her, she was still of opinion that Kate was at least as anxious to get Harry, as he was to get her—far too anxious, in fact, to think for a

moment of letting a point of etiquette stand between her and him. Harry, it need scarcely be said, was careful not to disabuse her of this idea. He put his submission on general grounds of filial duty, and his great argument—though it was very delicately put, for fear of giving offence—was, that she was prejudiced against Kate.

"Well, you must admit, mother," he would say, "that you are condemning her upon mere hearsay. You say, if all is true that you've heard, and from what you've been told, and the like of that; but you should see her, and judge for yourself; if you did, I feel sure you'd alter your opinion about her."

At first, Mrs. Mason had answered, emphatically, that she was very well sure, she never would. Then she said, dubiously, she didn't think so; and finally yielding to importunity, she said—

"Well, I'll ask Mr. Grant and Charley to tea on Sunday, and you can bring her if you like, but that wont be to say that I think you ought to marry her."

"Oh no! that doesn't necessarily follow," answered Harry, with his most candid air, though in his own mind he had no longer any doubt. He felt that he had conquered so far, that complete victory was merely a question of time, and not a very long time either.

## CHAPTER IX.

## STILL WORKING ROUND.

AVING gained his main point, Harry Mason proceeded to arrange details after his own fashion, and certainly gave himself considerable latitude in doing so.

Six weeks had passed since the Sunday afternoon tea at Fairfield's, and during that time he had studiously avoided any allusion to the reciprocal phase of such teas. He had felt that such delay was dangerous, and now that he was free to speak, determined to lose no further time.

Accordingly, when seeing Kate home from her work on the evening following the one on which he had gained his mother's consent, he observed in an off-handed sort of way, intended to suggest that the notion had just that moment occurred to him, "By the way, Kate, though I've been to your place to tea, I've never asked you back to ours yet; what do you say to coming next Sunday?" She did not answer immediately, and after a momentary pause he went on: "The

fact is, I would have asked you before, only on Sunday my mother generally lies down for an hour or two in the afternoon, and goes to chapel at night, but this time old Sandy Grant and Charley Thompson are coming to tea, and so I thought I'd just ask you."

"I suppose it's all settled between Charley and your Fan, then?" she said, not making any direct reply.

"What, did you know he was after her?"

"I knew he was after her, if he was after any one," she answered; "but I used to think he wasn't after any one, except in a flirting sort of a way. But do you mean to say *you* didn't know he was sticking up to Fan?"

"I didn't till very lately; and even now I think, to use your own words, that it's only in a flirting kind of way. So far as I'm aware, he's not given up his notions of knocking about the country, and a wife being a clog upon a young fellow, and all the rest of it; but my mother and Fan swear by him, and seem to be of opinion that, like the King, he can do no wrong, so I leave them to it."

"His going to tea looks as if he meant something," she said.

"Well, with his lodging next door, and having been in the habit of running in and out the house as my mate, it doesn't necessarily mean much in his case," he answered; "in

fact, if he wanted, he could easily make it appear that it didn't mean anything. Not but what I think he's fond enough of Fan, and I'm sure she's decidedly sweet on him ; but if he doesn't mean something definite, that's only so much the worse for her. If I had my way I'd bring him to book ; I don't believe in flirting or long courtships."

"Well, I suppose they're both very bad things," said Kate, with a faint smile, "though some people don't think so."

"Oh ! I know it's a matter of taste, or as I should say, of want of taste," answered Harry, with just a shade of pique in his tone ; "some people think the one pleasurable and the other profitable ; but some people, notwithstanding experience, will show that there's more heartbreak and misery than anything else comes out of them. But speaking of Charley," he went on, suddenly changing his tone, and speaking with a rather forced smile, "do you know, Kate, I used to think that it was you he was after ; what was more, I used to think that you thought more of him than any other fellow, and I don't mind telling you now, it made me feel very jealous and miserable."

"What made you think Charley was after me ?"

"Well, Clayton and some of the others used to chaff him about you ; then Fan, as I can see

now, was awfully jealous of you, and he used to speak about you himself."

" Ah ! say I would make a bad poor man's wife ; that he wouldn't like to have me on less than five hundred a year, and so on."

" Oh ! then some one has been telling you that he talks that way about you."

" Oh dear no ! He talks that way *to* me. I don't suppose Charley would say anything behind my back that he wouldn't say to my face ; and what's more, I don't believe he'd say it at all, meaning me harm."

" Well, no further than that though he says it in a half joking kind of way, he really means it, and that was just what made me feel jealous. Though he evidently believed in this not very complimentary idea of his about your extravagance and uselessness, it still struck me that he thought a very great deal of you—in fact, I'm sure he did."

" Well, as far as that goes," she said, with a slight blush, " I thought a good deal of him in a friendly way, and I don't suppose he thought of me in any other."

" Well, I do," he said, with considerable emphasis. " Speaking by the light of what I know now, I'm positive he was a long while before he could make up his mind between you and Fan. If he *had* been well off, I fancy her chance would have been a small one ; but there's no doubt

about her being his choice now. As he has such tremendously practical ideas about marriage, I thought he might be after Fan just for the sake of her business; but I've watched things pretty closely, and I can see that he really is in love with her."

"I'm sure he couldn't be in love with a better girl," said Kate, on Harry at this point coming to a stop and seeming inclined to let the conversation drop.

"Well, of course," he said, in answer to this, "she's not exactly the style to take a fellow's heart by storm; but still she's got many good qualities, and I begin to understand her being the sort of girl to grow upon a fellow that's seen so much of her as Charley has. Looking at his notions of a working-man's wife, she'll suit him a deal better than such a girl as you would have done."

"What do you suppose are his notions, then?" she asked.

"Why, it seems to me," he answered, "that his idea of a wife is a sort of unpaid slavey. He'd have her to be always going about with her sleeves rolled up and thinking of nothing but washing and scrubbing; to eschew anything above a clean cotton dress, and to bear the possibility, not to say probability, of the workhouse constantly in view."

"Oh! I think that's going too far, Harry,"

she said. "I know Charley wouldn't be a bad husband."

"He wouldn't be a wilfully cruel one, but he wouldn't be a good one for a girl with ambition or refinement. I don't say his notions may not be very commendable ones for a man and woman content to remain at the bottom of the ladder all their lives; still, they're not mine. I am of opinion that while she should certainly be a housewife, a working-man's wife, like any other one's, should also be an intelligent companion to him, and a lady, too, in essentials."

"Well, I've heard Charley say the very same thing," she said, smiling.

"Oh, as far as that goes, so have I," he replied, rather tartly; "but people can attach a very different meaning even to the same thing. Charley's essentials are of the cost-me-nothing order; and though in strict theory they *are* the essentials, I should like to go a little beyond the theory, a little more towards the lady as she's understood in practice. But, however, we're getting right away from our subject. The thing is, will you come down to our place to tea on Sunday? It's not a very important matter, but still, Kate," he went on, lowering his voice to a lover-like tone, "you see, my mother knows how I'm held towards you, and of course she'd like to know you."

"And of course I'd like to know your mother,

Harry," she answered, "and to see Fan again. I have not seen her since the ball."

"Then we'll put it down that you'll come."

"Oh yes," she answered, with a faint smile. "You know you never asked me before," and then they walked on for awhile in silence ; Harry in a triumphant and self-congratulatory mood, and Kate in an unwontedly thoughtful one.

To Harry the incidental conversation about Charley Thompson had simply been—so much incidental conversation. To Kate it had been a great deal more. She was too thoughtless, in a general way, to think very deeply about anything ; but, so far as her nature admitted, she had thought seriously of her connexion with Harry Mason, and the result had not been satisfactory. From the first she had liked him, and the liking had increased with time. She was proud of his attentions, as coming from a young fellow of such appearance, reputation, and promise, that many other girls would have considered him a "catch;" and she appreciated his devotedness, and felt a sort of compassionating gratitude towards him for it. But—and here the "but" was all-important—as soon as their intimacy had become such as to cause her a moment's self-examination, she knew that it was only liking, pride, gratitude, not love, that she felt for him. Not the spontaneous, thrilling, joy-giving

feelings with which Charley Thompson, or, still more, Frank Hamilton—the hero of *her* love's young dream—had inspired her. Since she had allowed him to look upon himself as her avowed lover, the knowledge of this state of her own feelings had sometimes weighed heavily upon her, and once or twice she had thought of breaking off the engagement. But when she had hinted at such a thing at home, her mother had exhibited such violent symptoms of a return to "nagging," that she hastily withdrew her hints, gave up thinking upon the subject, and allowed things to take their course. Harry's invitation, however, had once more brought her face to face with her position, and again the idea of breaking off the engagement had occurred to her. Should she go on with the affair, and take this further step which would make retreat even more difficult than at present. Harry was a very nice fellow, certainly, and seemed to be sure of getting on in the world. Still, he wasn't such a great "catch" that a girl should want to marry him, even if she didn't care as much about him as she supposed a girl should care for the fellow she was going to marry. But then she had gone so far with him, and if she was to throw him over now her mother would lead her such a life! These were the ideas that flashed through her mind on Harry's first asking her to come to his mother's to tea; but while she yet hesitated

among them, the accidental mention of Charley Thompson's name suddenly diverted the current of her thoughts, and induced her to turn the conversation upon the subject of his relations with Fanny Mason. Frank Hamilton, whose name ever recurred to her mind whenever it dwelt upon her own love affairs, had, at this period, become little more than a memory to her—a sweet, romantic memory which she ever delighted to recal, but which, practically, had little more effect upon her than the recollection of some of the aristocratic heroes of her favourite stories. On the other hand, she regarded Charley Thompson as a very vivacious reality—a reality in the way of young fellows for which she cared more than all others. She knew much better than any one could tell her, that Charley had thought a good deal of her; and, up to the time of the picnic, she had thought and hoped that, despite the counter-attraction of Fanny Mason—of which she was fully aware—he would have declared himself her lover. After the picnic, as has been intimated, they saw very little of each other for some time, but she had expected that he would have come forward again at the commencement of the dancing season; and, had he done so, she would have unhesitatingly thrown Harry over. It was in the expectation that Charley would ask her, that she had at first declined to promise to go the ball with Harry;

and it was hearing from the latter that Charley had asked his sister to go, that had caused her to so suddenly consent to go with him, after having persistently resisted his arguments and entreaties. At the ball she had seen that Fanny was triumphant ; and now she concluded from what Harry said that the triumph was a lasting one. She, too, could understand that Fanny was the kind of girl to grow upon a man ; and she knew that though Charley was the most impulsive of beings when with a girl, he was just the one to allow reason to mingle with, and correct, love when from under the spell of their presence, or before doing anything formally decisive. She felt that between herself and Fanny he had finally decided—decided in favour of Fanny. She found that as a lover, or possible husband, he was altogether lost to her ; and the conviction that such was the case materially modified her views concerning Harry. She had been very fond of Charley, she admitted to herself, but still she hadn't been that desperately in love with him that she need spoil her own chances in life, or assume any tragedy airs because he preferred another girl. She could still be friends with him while he remained in Stonebury, and when he went away he, too, would become a mere memory, as Frank—dear Frank, as she called him even in her musings—had done. Apart from those two, of course, she did think more of

Harry than any one else, and she knew that he thought everything of her, and would do anything for her, and let her have her own way. And, after all, he was more genteel than Charley, and cleverer, and a great deal more likely to rise —in a word, was a better match.

It was while this revolution of feeling in his favour was upon her, that Harry for the second time put the question about her coming to tea, and obtained her favourable answer. During the short silence which then ensued she further resolved within herself that from that time forward she would have no more hesitation in the affair, that she would look upon herself as irrevocably engaged to Harry, and go through the remaining phases of company-keeping as willingly and gracefully as might be.

Harry of course knew nothing of this resolve, or of the train of thought that had preceded it, and he was rather astonished at Kate's ready unquestioning acquiescence in his suggestions, when he presently returned to the subject of the proposed Sunday afternoon visit.

"I say, Kate," he began, in a stammering, uneasy sort of way, "I've just been thinking—that is, if you wouldn't mind it—that it would be as well for you not to put on anything very dashing when you are coming down to our place. You know," he hurried on in an apologetical tone, "old people have their notions about the good

old times, and the folly and extravagance and all the rest of it of the rising generation. I suppose it's a sort of weakness we're all liable to if we live long enough, and my mother among others is rather troubled with it. She talks about 'When I was a girl,' makes out that then was the true golden age, and, by implication, that this is the age of brass ; and, as a matter of course, one of her great points of contrast between the good old, and bad present times, is the dressiness of the girls now-a-days. It's no use trying to show an uneducated woman like my mother that the accusations brought by past or passing against rising generations are stock ones, old as the human family itself, and probably only one of the inevitable results of the change in our modes of thought which come with years. You might show her the papers of a hundred and fifty years ago teeming with the very same complaints that are made to-day about girls being too fond of dress and above their stations, and she'd only say, 'Oh, don't tell me,' and stick to her opinion. She wouldn't say anything in a fault-finding way to you, she's got better manners than that, but her 'When-I-was-a-girl' notions are among her hobby-horses, and if you happened to have anything striking about your dress she might want to argue the point with you, and I thought it would be better to humour her a bit than chance that. You know how I mean, Kate!"

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The desire to display what he conceived to be his philosophic views, combined with his nervous anxiety to disarm the resentment with which he feared Kate might receive his suggestion, had carried him along at such a rate up to this point that Kate had had no opportunity of putting in a word, and now there was something of an anti-climax in the almost submissive tone in which, bearing her newly-formed resolution firmly in her mind, she answered—

“Yes, I understand, Harry; and I’m glad you mentioned it. I get blowings up enough at home about my dress.”

“Oh, but hang it, Kate, I wasn’t thinking of anything so strong as blowing up. If any of my friends——”

“Oh, I know, Harry; nor I didn’t exactly mean that either. But any way I’ll dress neatly; of course I should like to please your mother.”

Harry, as we know, was unfeignedly anxious that she should do so; but he knew that it would likely be a more difficult matter than he dared let her suppose. Spurred by this knowledge, however, and encouraged by the more than anticipated success that had attended his efforts so far, he ventured upon another bold step in the way of suggesting a further conciliatory concession upon Kate’s part.

“Well, yes,” he said, in a meditative way in reply to her last remark; “and speaking of that,

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you know, Kate, mother is a great chapel-woman in her way. She'll very likely be going in the evening, and if you were to volunteer to go with her, you'd quite win her heart. She'd think you quite a model personage, almost good enough to have lived when 'I was a girl.' "

"But how could I?" questioned Kate, with just a suspicion of a rising spirit of opposition in her tone.

"Well, on such occasions, she usually says, 'If you wont mind me leaving you with Fan for an hour or so, I'll just go to chapel; I like to go once a day.' Then I could say, Well, I think Kate and I will go too; and you could agree—but not without you like, you know. What do you say?"

An hour before she would have repudiated any such notion with scorn, and even now she paused. But recalling her resolution to mind before her hesitation had become sufficiently marked to cause her consent to appear forced, she answered—

"Very well, Harry, if you think it will please the old lady so much, I'm agreeable."

Harry saw that, even allowing for Kate's complacent mood, he had gone quite as far as was safe. And, indeed, he did not see how he could have gone any farther just then, even if he had desired. The last point gained he considered a decidedly important one. It was a point that

would cut two ways: it would not only, he argued, place Kate in an unexpectedly favourable light, but it would greatly lessen the moral strength of any subsequent opposition to the match that his mother might be disposed to offer. After the Sunday, he could point out to her that her having been seen in public with Kate and him implied a tacit consent upon her part; could argue that all interested would necessarily take that view of the case; that therefore further opposition would scarcely be regarded as honourable by the little world that concerned itself with their affairs, and would certainly hardly be kind to him; he too having taken her action to mean consent.

In so readily agreeing to go to chapel, Kate had yielded a great deal, so much that Harry, not knowing her "springs of action," was even more surprised than pleased at it. Mrs. Mason belonged to the Primitive Methodists—the vulgar "Ranters"—the sect which all genteel sectaries combine in holding most in contempt and derision. The sect which held noisy raree-show-like revival and camp meetings in a large field outside the town; which had an Hallelujah band, and lionized the Converted Burglar. Which allowed women—sisters of the connexion—to appear in the pulpit; had working shoemakers and waggoners among its "local preachers," and a regular shepherd, known in the town as "Old

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Rusty," the allusion being to the seedy appearance of his clothes—a seediness easily to be accounted for when it was considered that he had to support a wife and family out of his stipend of twenty-four shillings per week. The sect whose proceedings were a by-word and a scoff alike among other religionists and those of no religion at all; among genteel worshippers who thanked the Lord they were not as the vulgar Ranters were, and thoughtless street boys or brainless snobs, who howled catch-phrases through the door of their Little Bethel. The sect whose chapel was up a dirty, narrow court; whose congregation shouted, groaned, and felt or affected ecstasy; sang hymns to song tunes, and spoke of feeling and being moved by "the spirit." They *might*, it is true, be a sincere, earnest, well-meaning sect, but they were undoubtedly a low—a very low one. This being the case, it will be easily understood that it must have cost Kate an effort to consent to go to their chapel even for once. In their attendance at places of public worship, as in everything else, Bentley's young ladies were genteel. Fanny Mason had certainly been a member of the "Ranters," even while at Bentley's; but then "Little Dimples" had been an exceptional personage, and her being a "Ranter," and not being ashamed to own it, had been set down as part of her general want of dash and go. But that any of Bentley's young

ladies proper, and especially Kate Fairfield, who, in such things, had been looked upon as the noblest Roman of them all, should go to the "Ranters'" chapel, was indeed a sacrifice. Kate had felt that it was so, even while she made it; but deeming the observance of her resolution demanded that she should make it, she did so.

Having agreed to the return tea, Mrs. Mason determined to carry it out in style; but it need hardly be said that her preparations were of a different character from what Mrs. Fairfield's had been. There was no well-sofa work about the tidying of her place, nor any borrowing of apparatus wherewith to furnish forth the feast. Their parlour, however, was put into spic-and-span order, the best tray and tea-service placed in readiness, and tea-cakes and other extras in that line laid in. In order to receive Kate with due effect, she put on her best cap and gown, which became her very well, and assumed a sort of stately reserve of manner which did not become her at all. Between three and four Harry brought Kate, who, it was evident at a glance, had borne in mind her promise about her dress. There was nothing in the least loud in the colour, or, what Mrs. Mason would have called, fal-da-rallish in the cut of any of her garments; nor was there, on the other hand, the least approach to dowdiness about them. They were neat and well-fitting, showing off her figure to advantage; while the

slight flush which came over her cheeks as she entered the house certainly did not detract from the beauty of her face. Though Mrs. Mason prided herself upon not judging by appearances, especially first appearances, Kate's appearance undoubtedly made a favourable impression upon her. There was less of conventionality in the smile, and more of warmth in the shake of the hand, with which she received her than she had originally intended there should be. There was still more warmth in the kiss and "Well, Kate," with which Fanny greeted her. When they had worked together they had been very good friends. In trade matters Fanny had been far the cleverer of the two, but in things social, dashing Queen Kate had often been in a position to do good service to quiet, bashful, "Little Dimples," and she had always done so in a delicate and unostentatious spirit. Now that she no longer regarded her as a rival, Fanny remembered this, and feeling somewhat remorseful concerning the hard things she had said of her when she did think she wished to steal Charley's love from her, she, by way of atonement, received her warmly, and did all she could to place her at her ease in what she knew must be a rather trying position.

As soon as she had welcomed her she took her upstairs to take her bonnet and cloak off, and when they came down again they were chatting together in quite a friendly way. When

they joined the others the talk turned upon the old times at Bentley's—that is to say, the time when Fanny was a hand there ; and Kate, in all simple sincerity, bore testimony to Fanny's sterling qualities. This honest praise of her daughter was grateful to Mrs. Mason, and tended to place Kate still higher in her good graces. From Bentley's the conversation drifted into a variety of other topics. Mrs. Mason every now and again putting out a "feeler" on the subject of household management. Her questions were at first of a very general character, and Kate answered them pretty well ; and before she could push the subject into details, Charley Thompson and Sandy Grant arrived ; and the conversation once more became miscellaneous in its character. Charley's arrival gave a new interest to the party. All of them noted his proceedings as carefully as they could consistently with not letting him or each other see that they were doing so ; and all were speedily satisfied that if he was in love with either of the girls it was with Fanny. He was not at all demonstrative about her, paid her no particular attentions, assumed no lover-like airs ; but still there was a "something" in his manner towards her more strongly indicative than any mere outward demonstration could have been, of another "something" more than friendship—a something that now, at any rate, was wanting in his manner

towards Kate. No one saw this more quickly or convincingly than Kate herself. To all outward seeming he was more attentive to her than to Fanny, but she missed that subtle under-current of tone and look which, while often invisible to "outsiders," means everything to spirits placed *en rapport* by love or a strong mutual predisposition to it. And while between him and her this electricity of love was wanting, she, as well as the other watchers, could occasionally detect it flashing between him and Fanny —could see it in such things as the apparently accidental contact of their hands when they were all looking over an album, and the sparkle of their eyes when their glances met. The consciousness of this touched her pride, and made her assume a very loving bearing towards Harry, but the love was more in her manner than her heart. She feared lest any coldness towards Harry might be attributed to warmth for Charley, and acted upon the impulse of this fear.

None but herself, however, knew her motive, and her manner was another point in her favour with Mrs. Mason; made Harry inexpressibly happy, and gave comfort to Fanny, whose chief fear had been that Kate did not return her brother's love.

The tea passed off in a merry, comfortable style, and when it was over things fell out just as Harry had suggested would be the case—only

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they went a little further than anticipated. As soon as it had been arranged that Kate and he were to accompany his mother to chapel, Charley Thompson exclaimed "Let us all go together—we've had a good tea, we ought to be able to stand a sermon now;" and no one offering any objection, they all went.

Acting upon a suggestion of Harry's, they all went for a stroll up the Abbotsgate road when they came out of chapel; and among the many whom they met taking after-church or chapel walks along that favourite road, were a number of Bentley's young ladies, attended by their admirers. To these, conversant as they were in all that related to company-keeping, "the situation" in the Mason party was evident at a glance, and though most of them had been prepared for such a thing in a general way, it came upon them with surprising suddenness at the moment. All of them stared; some of them, when they had passed, snickered; and one daring spirit, when he had made quite sure that Charley Thompson was out of hearing, called out "Hallelujah." When the first feeling of surprise was over, some of them said "I told you so!" and others "I wouldn't have thought it!" Some said Kate might have done better, and others suggested that it was of Harry that ought to be said; but they all agreed that it was all right between them now. And when on her leaving

the house—to which they all returned to supper—his mother, after a momentary hesitation, which no one but himself observed, kissed, instead of affecting not to notice, Kate's offered lips, Harry too said to himself triumphantly that it was all right between Kate and him.

## CHAPTER X.

## THE COURSE OF LOVE IS CLEARED.

**M**ORNING reflections are rarely altogether pleasant ones—even when upon subjects abstractly pleasant. But if less sanguine and less self-satisfactory than opinions formed under the immediate influence of action and excitement, they are also safer and more profitable. Their function is to modify—to modify the first impressions and conclusions that have been slept upon. When, therefore, on the Monday morning, Harry Mason's thoughts turned upon the events of the preceding day, those events presented themselves in a somewhat different light than they had done at the time of their occurrence. It was all right between Kate and himself, he had said overnight, but on coming to this point now his musings ran—Well, if they weren't exactly all right just then, they soon would be. Of course he wasn't quite out of the wood yet; there were still obstacles—one very considerable one—to be worked round, but he had been so fortunate in that line so far, that

he had no doubt of speedily achieving ultimate success. To which end he determined to lose no time in continuing his operations in social engineering.

"Well, what did you think of Kate, mother?" he asked, when he went home to dinner. "She's not quite such a terrible being as you thought her, after all, is she now?"

"Well, I don't know so much about that, Harry. If I had seen her at the washing-tub, or cooking a dinner, or knew how much a week she could put by out of a mechanic's wages—if I'd done that, then I could tell you whether or not she'd be a terrible being for a working-man to have for his wife, for I suppose that's how you mean."

Mrs. Mason's morning reflections had tended to make her regret having been so conciliatory towards Kate, and now she "took it out" in speaking of her with an extra severity of tone.

Harry was rather taken aback by her manner; and seeing this, and feeling, perhaps, that the remarks in some degree applied to herself, Fanny replied—

"Oh but, mother, a girl that has to get her living by her needle till she's married, has to learn all those sort of things after, and I suppose most people get better at them the longer they are married. I daresay you wasn't as clever a housekeeper at first as you are now."

"I daresay not, Fan," she answered; "but I had the makings of a good housekeeper in me, and, if I'm not mistaken, that's just what Kate Fairfield hasn't."

"That remains to be seen," said Fanny.

"Ah! but then this is one of those cases in which it's worse than useless to be wise after the event. I think I see it now. She's got more of the makings of a fine lady about her, and to any one rich enough to let her be a fine lady I've no doubt she'd make a very good wife. I don't want to run the girl down. If she was coming here as your friend I'd be glad enough to see her; but as things are between her and Harry it's up another street, as Charley Thompson talks about. I daresay she's a nice enough girl in a many ways, and I'm not going to deny but what she's good-looking—very good-looking—and I know that that's often all that young men look to. But, as I've said before, good looks don't always mean good sense or good housekeeping, and when they don't they mean very little in a wife, and are thought very little of after marriage. It's wonderful what a difference marriage makes in a man's ideas of what a wife ought to be. Before marriage, beauty is everything; after, it's only one thing, and in many cases just serves to keep a man in mind of what a fool it's made of him."

"Do you mean to argue, then, that only

ugly girls should get married?" asked Harry, somewhat tartly.

"Oh dear, no! I would like to see every young man with a healthy, nice-looking wife. But at the same time I do mean to argue that a working-man ought not to marry one of your talked-about, run-after, extra beauties. I never knew any good to come of such marriages, and I have known a good deal of ill. They nearly always turn out uncomfortable, and sometimes worse than that. Your poor father and I knew a young fellow that married one of this sort. At first when he used to grumble about his meals not being ready, or the like of that, she used to stop him with a kiss, but that didn't do for long. It soon got from kissing to cursing, and with that, and his not paying her a lot of the fussy fal-lal attentions she thought she had a right to on the strength of her good looks, she set up for being dreadfully ill-used, and they led a regular cat-and-dog life while it lasted. For the end of it was that one fine morning, before they had been married a year, she ran away with a flash clerk that was bolting with a lot of his master's money."

"And a good riddance, too, for the husband, I should say," interrupted Fanny.

"Oh no, it wasn't, Fan," answered her mother. "You are talking now of what you know nothing about. Most men—especially young ones —

would a thousand times rather put up with a bad wife than be rid of her in that way. There's no disgrace touches a man like that, it makes him feel small in his own estimation, because he thinks it makes him look small in every one else's. This young man that I speak of never looked up after it. It drove him to drink. He drank himself out of work, out of health, and out of his friends' good books, and became a miserable, uncared-for waster on the face of the earth."

"Oh, that may be all very cutting to those who think so," said Harry, with an impatient shake of the head, when his mother had concluded; "but then you see, yours, like the generality of the horrid-example school of cases in point, is so extreme as to altogether overshoot its mark. If this choice anecdote of yours means anything, it is that because a silly, empty-headed girl runs away from a coarse, tactless, drunkenly-inclined fellow whom she ought never to have married, I shouldn't marry another girl because she happens to be handsome. Upon my word, mother, if it had been anybody but you that had talked that way I would have told them before now it was a lot of nonsense."

"But it isn't a lot of nonsense though," said his mother. "It just shows what may come of people not being able to see, that in wives, as in other things, what is one man's meat is another

man's poison. That the girl that may be the making of one man may be the marring of another."

"Oh, but I'm one of those who are able to see that," said Harry, allowing his temper to get the better of him for the moment, "and I think Kate is a girl to be the making of me."

"And I think she's one to be the marring of you," answered his mother, "and so that's just where we differ, and would do, however long we talked."

Here the conversation was brought to an end, for the time, by the necessity for Harry returning to his work ; but for the next month scarcely a day passed in which the subject was not again brought up for discussion in some form. Harry returned to it time after time, and always with more caution and less temper than he had displayed on this occasion. He pressed home the great argument with which he had furnished himself of his mother having received Kate so favourably, and, as opportunity offered, made the most of the sentimental side of the affair. He spoke of the extent to which his happiness was engaged in it, argued that while his mother's practical views were entitled to the utmost consideration, love was after all the prime foundation of domestic happiness, and quoted Shakespeare to the effect that there was beggary in the love that could be reckoned.

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Less moved, however, by her son's eloquence than by her own conviction that he meant to have his own way in the matter, even at the risk of quarrelling with her, Mrs. Mason at length resigned the contest. Her views had undergone no material change, but she believed that, if those views were correct, Harry would stand more in need of her friendship after his marriage than he had ever done before it; and so she yielded, while there was yet peace between them.

"Well, well, Harry," she said, one evening, when they had been going over the old ground of debate, "you are the party most concerned, and if your heart is set on it, why in God's name marry her as soon as you are in a position to do so."

This brought Harry to the second of the two chief obstacles to his making his course of love—up to the matrimonial stage—a short cut. He knew that his mother, with her practical, and he with his love-influenced views, would be likely to differ widely as to what would, in his case, be a position to marry. For this mere difference of opinion in itself he would not have cared much; but it became incidentally important to him, by reason of its being part of his plan that Fanny should, with her mother's approval, aid him in carrying out his ideas on the subject. Such assistance as he contemplated,

he could not, in common manhood, accept, if his mother advised his sister against giving it ; and in any case his purpose was to suggest it to Fanny's mind, rather than ask for it. He knew that he could not get married until he had a nicely-furnished little house. It was the sort of thing looked for in Stonebury, and Kate would neither expect nor be satisfied with less. But even little houses were not to be furnished without money—and he had none. With an almost immediate marriage in view, this was a difficulty, not an insuperable one, but still one that required a good deal of working round.

Since she had been to his mother's, Kate had yielded a tacit consent to his doctrine, that as 'twere well they should be married—for upon that point he expressed no doubt—'twere well it were done quickly. Mrs. Fairfield, too, declared herself in favour of short courtships and early marriages. In that connexion she informed Harry that she "knew of" several accommodating brokers, who would furnish a house from top to bottom for him on the weekly-payment system, if he could just get a couple of bondsmen ; while her husband gave him to understand that he was only restrained from offering himself as one of the bondsmen by the knowledge that no one would take him. Harry himself, however, knew of the instalment system of obtaining goods. It was a system

greatly resorted to by the poorer gentility of Stonebury. He knew of several young couples who had set up in housekeeping on that principle, and although he also knew of some of those parties having to be "county-courted" for arrears of payment, and of bondsmen having to suffer, he put it that such things would not apply in his case.

But if the weekly-payment system of house furnishing afforded facilities to couples who, being richer in love than money, were anxious to get married, but not able to pay in the lump, it had also its drawbacks. It was much dearer than the ready-money system, and gave much less freedom of choice; and, after all, it didn't look very well, and it really was an awkward clog upon those concerned, the scale of payments being calculated in a proportion to the income that required everything to go straight to keep them up. In addition to all this it would, in his case, Harry reflected, give a handle to his mother and others who had opposed his marriage on practical grounds. Looking at all these objections to it, Harry, while holding the weekly-payment scheme in reserve, determined only to adopt it as a last resource.

In the meantime it occurred to him that something better might be done. If he hadn't got money, Fanny had; since her business had been successful she had saved somewhere between

thirty and forty pounds, and if she would only lend him that, or some considerable portion of it, he would be all right. Then no one beside her and his mother would know that he had borrowed the money ; and though of course he would insist upon paying her back with proper interest, still there would be no danger of county-court proceedings or anything of that kind if he *should* at any time happen to fall back a little in his payments. As he would give a higher rate of interest than she was getting in the Post Office Savings Bank, he would really be benefiting her by borrowing the money. At least so he tried to persuade himself, though strangely enough he couldn't bring himself to ask for the loan. His mother and sister he said to himself, by way of excuse, mightn't see the matter exactly in the same light as he did if he asked for the money ; they might even think that he was acting selfishly. But if the idea could be made to strike Fanny herself in the right light—the light that it would be conducive to her brother's happiness—she was just the girl to volunteer the loan. It was having this object in view that had made him still remain in such a conciliatory mood towards his mother and sister after he had achieved his great point of getting them to receive Kate. It was necessary that he should be on friendly terms with them, and have their full verbal consent to his marrying Kate at all, before he could advance

the discussion of his matrimonial designs to the stage in which he hoped to be able to deftly insinuate his idea into Fanny's mind. He knew that the notions he was about to propound in this last stage were of a character calculated to startle his relatives, and he opened the discussion with a boldness suited to the occasion.

When she had formally withdrawn her opposition to her son's marrying Kate, Mrs. Mason concluded that she had done with the affair altogether for some considerable time. She was therefore almost as much surprised at his returning to the subject at all as she was at the purport of his question, when an evening or two later, Harry, without the slightest preliminary beating about the bush, opened the attack by asking—

“I say, what would you people think of me being married in two or three months from now?”

He stood in front of the kitchen fire, and as he spoke glanced at his mother and sister, who were seated in their usual places on either side of the fireplace. He knew that his question would startle them, and he met the looks of astonishment with which they greeted it with a half-amused smile. Fanny was the first to speak; but she merely echoed, “In two or three months from now!” and then the mother came briskly in—

"Think!" she exclaimed; "why, if I supposed you were in earnest, I should think you had gone out of your mind altogether. Getting married means setting up a house, and that means spending money—a good bit of money too—more I expect than you are aware of."

"Well!" said Harry, and the manner in which he spoke made the "well" mean "And what then?"

"Well!" echoed back his mother, indignantly; "well, you've got no money of your own, and I hope you don't think we've got any to give you—not that it would be our place to do it if we had—and if the Fairfields have got any to give you they must have got it lately and unbeknown to a good many people as would like to see the colour of their coin. Get married in two or three months indeed! Just let me think you on, my lad, that if everybody has their own, you'll hardly be out of debt in that time, especially if you go on dressing and gallivanting about, the way you've been doing of late."

"Now just listen, mother," said Harry. "I am in earnest, and I want to talk the matter over with you seriously, and I hope you won't be ill-tempered or unreasonable about it. In my opinion, a long courtship is a great mistake—it's a waste both of time and money. When a young fellow is courting he must dress and gallivant about; it's the natural condition of the state,

and he can only think about the one thing. Of course, courting is a very pleasant way of spending your evenings, but it's not a profitable one for a young fellow like me, that wants to improve himself, and go in for club-work and other things of that kind, that may add a bit to his income and help to bring him on in the world. To get on in that way a fellow ought to be settled. In short, I take it that if I *had* money enough to start housekeeping, there could be no doubt that the very best thing for me to do would be to get married immediately."

"That's just as people may think," said Mrs. Mason. "But at any rate you haven't got the money, so it don't much matter."

"Well, that's just what I was coming to, if you hadn't interrupted me. As you say, I haven't got the money, nor do I want any one else to give it to me. But, after all, there is such a thing as credit."

"There's such a thing as debt, if that's what you mean," broke in his mother; "and such things as brokers and tallymen, that charge you two prices, and stick to you like leeches till you've never got a penny to call your own, and your life's a burden to you."

"Oh, come now, that's going to extremes," replied Harry. "In my case credit would not so much mean debt as accommodation. If I was married I should be saving a good deal that

I have to spend now, in the way of sweetheating, and should, in all likelihood, be making some addition to my income by evening employments. In that way I calculate that I would be able to pay for furniture got on credit as soon, or sooner, than I would be able to save the money to buy it if I remained single; and, in the meantime, I would be improving my position. Do you see, mother?"

"No, I don't! What you say sounds all very fine, and may suit the notions of the young folks that are now-a-days. But however you may talk, credit does mean debt to a working-man, and debt is the greatest drawback he can have. You talk about improving your position and getting on in the world, and the rest of it, but let me tell you—and I've seen more of the world than you have—that debt is the greatest wing-clipper you can have. If anything will keep a man from rising it's that."

"And you know what father used to say, Harry, when people spoke about getting things on credit," put in Fanny: "'Nothing makes debt like debt.'"

"Oh, his was rather an Irish notion," said Harry, "that to get out of debt you must get further into it."

"He never said so!" exclaimed Mrs. Mason. "The only thing at all like that I ever heard him say was, that getting into debt was like

falling into a river ; it was only by sinking all the rest of you that you could keep your nose above water. Your father was afraid of debt, and I thought all the more of him for it. When we were married—and at that time, you must remember, he was only a farm-labourer and me a dairymaid—our goods were all paid for ; we had a full cupboard to begin with, and five bright sovereigns to the good. And it was a blessed job for you that it was so. If it hadn't been for that, you'd have likely been a field-labourer at ten shillings a week instead of a mechanic at thirty. Even with the start we had it took us all our time for many years to keep our noses above water ; and if we had started in debt we couldn't have done it at all. After we were married we had our full share of trouble and poverty ; and we knew plenty about debt without having begun with a load of it round our necks."

" Well, but don't misunderstand me, mother ; I don't argue that debt is a good thing, but that there may be cases in which credit, when you can get it, is the lesser of two evils."

" There's no room for buts in the matter," retorted his mother ; " debt, or credit if you like to call it that, is a very bad thing. I speak of what I know, and that's why I'm so much against it. Through being sick or out of work a man may be compelled to go into debt after he is

married, but for a young man to go into a lot of debt to get married is a very bad thing—at least that's my opinion. At the same time, Harry, I'm not going to argue-bargue with you about this as I did about you keeping company with Kate. I've said my say, and I would like you to take my advice for your own sake; still, if you wont, I'm not going to quarrel with you over it. If Kate and you have made up your minds to get married in a hurry, I suppose you will, and though I think it's a bad way, I hope good will come of it."

This early withdrawal from the combat did not quite suit Harry's plans. He had intended the debate to continue over several evenings, in order that he might appear to have been gradually brought round to a partial change of opinion before making his chief point. At the right moment he had meant to admit—with his most candid air—that he could see now that the necessity for seeking credit under the circumstances he proposed was really a much greater evil than he had at first supposed it to be. And then following up the admission would have suggested—merely in a theoretical way, and as speaking of a thing argumentatively which he was perfectly aware could not be practically—that if he could only have borrowed the money wherewith to furnish a house it would have been of immense advantage to him.

His mother's unexpected surrender rather interfered with this plan, but by dint of cautiously returning to the general subject from time to time, under the plea of consulting his mother on points of detail as to the prices, fashions, and so forth of furniture, he was enabled to incidentally throw out his special point until at length his sister "saw it in the right light."

One evening, on his concluding a pathetic variation of his stock cry as to the great benefit a few pounds—about ten or twelve, say, of ready money—would be to him, Fanny, laying her work down on her lap, and looking up in his face, said—"Well, look here, Harry, if the money will be so much use to you as all that, why I'll lend it to you, and you can pay me some back every week instead of paying to a furniture dealer."

"Well, Fan, it's very kind of you," he answered; "I wouldn't have asked for it—in fact, wasn't thinking of such a thing—but if you will lend it me I shall be very glad. It'll be a great gain to me, and at the same time I'll take care it's no loss to you; of course I'll pay you interest the same as if the money was still in the bank."

Having thus succeeded in getting round his second great obstacle, Harry determined further to astonish his mother and sister, and hasten

matters to the desired (by him) climax by a final brilliant stroke. It was about the middle of November when Fanny volunteered the loan, and one night before the end of the month he put in his finishing blow—"Well, mother," he said as soon as he entered the house, "Kate and I have just been talking matters over in a serious business sort of way, and we've arranged to be married at Christmas. You see," he hurried on as his mother was about to break in with some remark, "I should want to have a few days' holiday when the wedding does come off, and at Christmas we shall be off work, any way; and so we thought if we were married then it would save me losing time later."

He had trusted to this plea disarming his mother's resentment, and he was not wrong in his calculation.

"Oh, well," she said, with a shrug of her shoulders, "as you wont wait a reasonable length of time, a month or two sooner or later wont matter much; and there is something in what you say. I expect you'll have little need to lose time after you are married." The last part of his mother's observation Harry knew was intended as a sneer, but he affected not to notice it, and so it was definitely arranged that he was to be married at Christmas, and he felt thoroughly triumphant thereat. He congratulated himself upon having smoothed his course of

love with a skill and rapidity worthy of that great cause. A year was an ordinary term of courtship, even when there were no obstacles in the way of the lovers; while he, in spite of the opposition he had encountered, had brought his company-keeping to a happy issue in less than six months. Within that time he had put down the interference of Sandy Grant and Charley Thompson, had brought his sister round to give him material aid in carrying out his own views, and overcome the bitter prejudice of his mother. But the latter, while yielding to him, was still persuaded, in her heart of hearts, that his was one of those disastrous victories that are worse than defeat, and she was inclined to grieve for the conqueror rather than the conquered.

## CHAPTER XI.

LOVE AND JUDGMENT.



UCK seemed to fight upon Harry Mason's side in his battle of love—at any rate, he thought so. He had made one or two of his best strokes just in the nick of time, and scarcely had he succeeded in bringing matters to the stage indicated in the last chapter, when a circumstance occurred that for a time put his love affairs into the shade—a circumstance which, had it happened earlier, would certainly have delayed his success, and possibly have prevented him from attempting some points of it.

According to the strict letter of the etiquette bearing on such matters, it might have been argued that the connexion between Fanny Mason and Charley Thompson did not amount to company-keeping ; but most of those interested in Fanny, and, what was of most importance, Fanny herself, considered, that practically, and in honour, it came to that ; and a few days after it had been arranged that Harry's company-

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keeping was to terminate in an early marriage, Fanny's was brought to an abrupt termination in a manner that left her heart very sore, and made her friends highly indignant. In order that the manner in which this came about may be understood, it will be necessary to trace back a little the action of Charley Thompson's mind in the matter. It was out of the fulness of his heart that he had spoken, when, as he took Fanny home from the ball, he told her he loved her better than all the world. Folding her in the embrace to which she so trustfully yielded, remembering her many sterling qualities and endearing ways, and being under the influence of the triumph she had achieved at the party—being thus blissfully situated, he really had felt that he loved her better than all the world—had felt it so strongly that, despite what apart from such influences he would have called his better judgment, he had been impelled to give expression to it passionately and pointedly, and with no shade of that bantering manner which in milder passages of the kind had left his words open to a more playful construction, and saved Fanny from taking the last step of making verbal confession of her love for him.

But when, in the cool grey of the morning, he got into his own lodgings, and sat down for a minute or two in its fireless kitchen, a reaction speedily set in. Not that he any longer doubted

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as to his love for Fanny, the self-examination to which he had subjected himself since the coming-of-age party, and the experience of the night just past, perfectly satisfied him on that point. So far his mind remained firm and untroubled, but he began to wish that he had never told his love. He had done so under great excitement of spirits, but with the return to the commonplace surroundings of everyday life came a return of commonplace thought. He bethought him of the course of trade-training he had marked out for himself, a course that he was still determined to persevere in, while at the same time he remained of opinion that the efficient carrying out of it precluded the idea of anything in the shape of a matrimonial engagement. As the resolutions he had so frequently made on this subject came back to his mind, he sincerely regretted having spoken as he had done, and viciously kicking off his boots, confounded himself for having so lost his head.

But he couldn't throw off his thoughts as he did his boots ; they stuck to him, followed him to bed, haunted his dream-broken sleep, and were still uppermost in his mind when he met Georgey Clayton in their breakfast hour on the following morning.

Their conversation naturally turned upon the ball, and after a few general remarks, Clayton made some joking allusion to Charley's loving

manner towards Fanny on the previous night, and the comments it had excited among Bentley's young ladies ; to which Charley, with a serious air, replied—

" Well, the long and short of it, Georgey, is, that I've about done it now."

" Why, yes," answered Clayton, " I should say you had crossed the river this turn, and no mistake ; of course, after this, Fan will be expecting you to ask her to name the day—that is, if you didn't do so on the way home."

" Well, I didn't exactly do that, but I said so much that she'll at least expect that, if I go away from here, I'll make some regular arrangement about writing to her, and sending for her when I get a job, and all the rest of it ; and I can only blame myself for giving her such good occasion for thinking so."

" Well, upon my word, Charley," said Clayton, " after what I saw of your performance, I should have thought you meant business, and would wish her to think so. If you don't, I must say that I think you are not doing the right thing."

" That's true enough in a general way, Georgey," he answered ; " but circumstances alter cases, and as I am situated, that sort of thing wouldn't suit my book at all. If I can't have the next few years entirely free, it would be best for me to settle here at once, and that

would certainly be a case of bad is the best. I might be here a few years, just getting enough to live on, and then would come some amalgamation of lines or reduction of hands that would throw me out, very likely in a slack time, and then there I'd be with a wife and family, and nothing coming in to support them."

"Of course you'd have to take your chance of that, like other men," said Georgey.

"Yes, and I dare say if it came to the trial, I would just bear it and do the best I could, like other fellows," Charley answered; "but for all that, the mere thought of it makes me feel wild now."

"That's about what settling here would come to," he resumed, finding that Clayton made no further answer; "and as to a married fellow knocking about as I'm thinking of doing, that's out of the question. While long engagements under such circumstances are neither one thing or another, they don't leave you really free, and they generally give rise to a lot of tattle and fault-finding, and end in smoke."

"In fact, Charley, I suppose you mean you couldn't trust yourself to hold to a bargain of that kind?"

"I dare say I could now," he replied; "but still I should feel hampered by it. I wish to goodness I had gone straight to the big city instead of coming here. In these little places,

where everybody knows everybody else, there's nothing between never speaking to a girl, and regular company keeping and getting married, or being reckoned up as a scamp. Not that I would care much about that, as far as the natives generally are concerned ; but I wouldn't like Fan herself to think me a bad lot, and I suppose that's just what she will come to do if I don't say something definite after this ; though, if she could only see it, it would be much better to leave things just as they were before last night."

" Well, it strikes me, mate, that if she knew how you were talking, she would devilish soon put an end to the matter."

" I know that, Georgey ; but that's not what I want. I am tremendously in love with her, and hang it ! after all, I'm not quite so bad as I seem. It's more for her sake than my own that I do speak this way, for the women get the worst of it if hard times come on a family. I've seen so much of the misery arising out of improvident marriages, that the idea of it frightens me, or else, as far as my own feelings go, I would like to marry Fan to-morrow."

Here the ringing of the workshop bell put a stop to the dialogue ; but love, which rules the court, the camp, the grove, also enters into the more prosaic region of the workshop. Many a time, amid the ringing of hammers and clatter of machinery, the fancy of a young work-

man lightly turns to thoughts of love; and as he mechanically applied his tools, Charley continued to ponder on his love difficulties until at length, by dint of turning the subject over and over, he believed he saw a silver lining to his cloud.

"But, perhaps," he muttered, "I'm giving myself more trouble about this than I have any occasion to do. Fan has enough of the woman in her to understand that, placed as I was last night, I must have been worse than a wooden fellow not to have acted something in the style I did, and so I dare say she'll make allowances if I shouldn't say anything more. At any rate, I think it will be best not to make another rash move till I see how things go. If I have crossed the river I needn't throw down my bridges."

On this notion he acted. As a sort of set-off to the passion he had displayed on the night of the ball he was almost cold towards Fanny for some days afterwards. Then he fell into his usual way sometimes, as on the evening of the day following Sandy's little supper, impulsively making love to her, and at other times restraining his feelings and trying to act in a merely friendly way.

But since the, to her, memorable long quadrille night, Fanny's idea never went back to mere friendliness. Before Charley had declared himself, she had tried—very unsuccessfully—to conceal the nature of her feelings for him. Some-

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times, when she thought of how others had overlooked her, and of the far more dashing girls with whom Charley was acquainted, she had even tried to stifle her love, lest it should turn out that his attentions to her were only friendly ones,—were dictated by pity, or a good humour, rather than love. But from the hour when led on by his passionate avowal, she had laid her head on his breast, and blushingly confessed her love, there had been nothing of this—no doubt, no divided thought, either as to her own or Charley's sentiments. Since then she had come to think of him as "My Charley." She had thought too highly of him to suppose that he would have any further hesitation in asking her to bring their love to a practical issue, and often found herself wondering as to the exact way in which he would do so, and how she would behave upon the occasion. As days and weeks went by without his making any sign, she sometimes felt a little disappointed. She knew his views; knew that he had no intention of marrying for some considerable time; but then she thought "he ought to know that I'm in no hurry,—that I'd wait for him, however long he wished, and he might say something now we're regular sweet-hearts." Still she did not doubt. Confident in her own true-heartedness, and blissfully ignorant of any fluctuation of feeling upon his part, she always contented herself by the theory that

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Charley didn't care about being fussy over the matter,—that as, according to his talk, he would soon be leaving Stonebury, he probably intended to defer everything till he was going away, as at that time he would be making some arrangements with her. Of course she would miss him a great deal when he was gone, she thought; but still it was right that he should push on in his trade, and then he would be writing to her and coming to see her at Christmas, and other holidays, and that would be so nice. It would make the time seem short too, till the arrival of the day when he would come to see her for the last time, and take her back with him to some great town as his wife, and then they would be *so* happy.

It was a pleasant little dream, and not at all an extravagant one, but Fanny was destined soon to have it rudely broken.

"Well, Charley Thompson is for off," said Harry to his mother and sister, on coming home from work one day about a week after he had announced his intentions of marrying at Christmas.

"How for off?" queried his mother.

"Why, leaving; going to London to work."

"Well, you know he's been saying for a long while past that he would go to the big city, as he calls it, somewhere about this time," said Fanny, trying to appear cool, though her heart was all a-flutter.

"Oh ! as far as that goes he's been talking about it ever since he's been here, but now he's going in a hurry. Let's see ; this is Wednesday. Well, he only got the letter this morning, and he goes away on Saturday. He has asked the gaffer to let him leave without the usual week's notice."

"Well, things that are long talked about generally are done in a hurry at last," said his mother. "But I dare say he'll be a bit put out at going away so suddenly?"

"What, him ?—the great advocate of the knock-about system ; the go-ahead-or-burst gentleman who is so down upon everybody and everything in Stonebury for being slow. Put out about going, eh ? 'Perish the thought !' Why, he's in such tremendous spirits at the mere idea of it, that it's enough to make one wonder how he has ever managed to exist here all this time."

Since he had come to the conclusion not to travel on the expiration of his own apprenticeship, Harry had taken to sneer at the knock-about system, and especially to sneer—in this connexion—at Charley Thompson, who certainly was given to speak somewhat braggingly of that system, and contemptuously of home-keeping youths. Hence Harry's tone upon the present occasion—a tone which made Fanny feel very indignant, and very desirous of rushing to Charley's defence,

but at the moment she couldn't think of anything to say. The sneer was palpable enough, but any charge contained in it was not so plain; and so the subject was allowed to drop.

Later in the evening, when Harry had gone courting, Charley came in, and at once confirmed the news.

"So you're going to leave us then, Charley, at the end of the week?" Mrs. Mason said to him.

"Yes," he answered; "I didn't intend to have gone till the spring, but I've got a chance now I mightn't have then. There's an old mate of mine, a leading hand in one of the big marine shops, writes to say that if I can be ready to begin on Monday, he can get me put on at his own bench; and to start under a friend is a great advantage to a fellow going into a strange shop and to a branch of the trade that's new to him. Beside, my friend will be going out as chief engineer of a large vessel the firm are building, and he'll be able to take me with him as one of his assistants, and you know I want to have a turn at sea?"

"Well, yes, I suppose you want to have a turn at everything in the way of your trade," answered Mrs. Mason. "And I dare say it's a good plan, for now-a-days a man can see more before it's time for him to settle than he used to do in a lifetime."

This last was a bit of a "feeler," thrown out with a view to leading Charley to say something about his ideas as to settling, or the length of time likely to be taken up in the trade peregrinations he proposed to himself; but he merely smiled, and answered, "Oh well, you acknowledge that there is some little good in the present age, then?"

"Oh yes, I'll acknowledge that," she said, laughing; "but at the same time that isn't to say there's not a good deal of bad in it too, and a great many people who think too much of themselves and their none-such age, as they think it."

Directly after this she went out in order to leave Fanny and Charley by themselves, as she, too, took it for granted that he would have some arrangements to make with her daughter. But though he stayed for some time, he confined his conversation exclusively to general topics. He had been "thinking things over" again during the day, and on the old grounds that he had so often before revolved in his mind, had once more come to the conclusion that it would be better to have no fixed engagement with Fanny—better that they should part merely as friends. On each of the two following evenings when he looked in for a short time, he was equally guarded as to his topics of discourse, but even then Fanny did not doubt. "I'll only say

good night now ; I'll come and say good-bye in the morning," he said, when leaving the house on the Friday night, and she felt serenely confident that he would make everything right at this last interview. The blow when it did come was therefore all the more severely felt from being entirely unexpected.

"I'm just going into your landlady's, Charley ; I'll be there when you come back," Mrs. Mason said, meeting him at her own door as he was coming in on the Saturday morning, and so he found Fanny alone.

Now that it had come to the pinch, he felt greatly agitated. He really loved the girl, but at the same time he really believed in his own theory as to things matrimonial, and between his love and belief he was sorely troubled. His better judgment, or what he supposed to be such, said, "Part from her without any lover-like demonstrations or pledges. It may look very bad of you to do so after the lengths to which you've gone with her, and will be sure to give both of you the heart-ache for a while ; but you'll soon get over that, and it will be the best and really the kindest plan too in the long run. It will leave all parties concerned untrammelled, and likely save worse heart twitchings further on ; while if in a few years you do want to settle, and should still find her free, explanation would probably rekindle love, and matters could be settled

out of hand." On the other hand, feeling and impulse urged him to take her in his arms, shower kisses upon her, murmur out his love, arrange to correspond with her two or three times a week, and marry her as soon as he should be settled in the shop to which he was going.

For the present judgment held sway, but the strife was a severe one, and Charley contrived to conceal the emotion which it caused him under a brisk gaiety of manner.

"I've come to wish you good-bye, Fan," he said, as soon as he was in the house. "The best of friends must part, you know."

"Well! I suppose they must," she said, coming to his side; "but—but all the same, Charley"—and here she glanced shyly up in his face—"I wish you hadn't to go."

"Well, you see, Fan, a young fellow is thought very little of now-a-days if he doesn't knock about a bit."

"Oh, I know I'm talking foolishly," she said, "but of course I didn't mean it, Charley. I wouldn't keep you back if I could, because I know it's for your own good you should go. What I meant was only—only how I shall miss you like."

Her eyes dropped and her cheeks were suffused with blushes as she spoke, while Charley found his impulse asserting itself to an extent that for a moment choked his utterance. Finding he made

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no immediate reply, Fanny, by way of covering her own confusion, went on—

“ But of course I shall be seeing you now and again? You’ll be coming down when there’s holidays, and cheap trips, and the like?”

“ Well, if things turn out as I expect,” he answered, “ I dare say I shall be running down again before very long. I should like to have a bit of a turn among my friends here before going to sea, for there’s no saying where I may get to afterwards.”

Judgment was for the moment in the ascendant again, and he spoke in a style intended to bring the tone of the interview down to the level of mere friendliness. But Fanny was too interested in the substance of what he said to take any particular notice of his manner of saying it. She had never seen the sea, and had exaggerated notions as to its dangers, and the idea of those dangers in connexion with her lover was an alarming one, and struck with especial chillness upon her in this parting hour.

“ But you needn’t go to sea unless you like, Charley?” she said, laying her hand softly upon his arm, and looking into his face with entreaty as well as love in her eyes.

“ Well, no,” he said, hesitatingly; “ at least there’s no *must* in it; it’s a matter of taste. He paused for a moment, and then partially succumbing to his impulse, he laid his hand on

her shoulder, and speaking in a lower, softer voice, went on, "There, I know what you mean, Fan, and it's very kind of you; but really there's no particular danger in going to sea."

"Oh! but see how many ships are lost, Charley."

"Well, yes, Fan, that's true enough," he answered in the same low tone; "but then look how many boilers blow up on shore, and how many men get caught in machinery, and buried in mines, and smashed in collisions; look how your own poor father was killed. We're all liable to accidents, and if they are to happen to us, it don't matter much whether it's ashore or afloat; and as to the rest, why, as somebody says —Harry would tell us who if he was here—heaven is as near by water as by land."

"You think you will go then, Charley?" she said, not attempting to reply to his arguments, but looking up in his face with a half-sorrowful, half-coaxing glance, which pleaded more powerfully than argument.

"Well! I don't know," he answered; "we'll see. I can't go yet awhile, and in the meantime there's no saying what may happen to prevent it. Though when I'm gone, I dare say most people hereabout will say that I may venture safely enough, on the ground that I'm not born to be drowned."

"Oh! I don't think that, Charley."

" Well, it don't matter much whether they do or not. But, Fan, I would care—care a very great deal—if you were to think badly of me."

" Why, Charley!" she said, and there was a volume of loving reproach in her tone.

" Well, no! There now, Fan, I know you wouldn't, come what may; and after all, I've meant well. You're a good girl, and wouldn't be hard on any one. I know you've always thought better of me than I deserve, and yet, hang it, Fan! you know——"

He hurried on in a half-petting, half-apologetical tone, scarcely knowing what he was saying. Had he completed the sentence in which he abruptly broke off, it would have been with "I do love you." He had pulled up on the very verge of the avowal, but his impulse which had urged him there was still more fiercely urging him to yet complete it. His hand was still on Fanny's shoulder, and he felt that he had but to give the slightest directing pressure to have her nestling on his breast; and with his hand trembling to give the touch, and the completion of the unfinished sentence hanging on his lips, he stood hesitating. He was strongly moved, and in another moment love would have triumphed, and the "better judgment" views of life been thrown to the winds, but for the occurrence of one of those insignificant, unlooked-for incidents which so often turn the current of more important

events with which they have properly no connexion. A look into her loving eyes had given victory to his impulse, his hand was already beginning to slip from her shoulder towards her waist, his lips were parted to make a final declaration of love, and confession and recantation of the notions that had prevented him making such declaration earlier in the interview, when at the critical instant the cab he had ordered to bring away his luggage drove up. It made a great clatter as it approached—a clatter that was horribly at variance with, and would have altogether drowned the low murmuring tone proper to a love declaration. It came upon them suddenly, and in the high-strung state of their feelings made them start apart as it drew up at the kerb, setting the windows rattling, and darkening the little parlour in which apartment the interview took place. Then came the cabman's rat-tat at the door of his lodgings, and for Charley the charm was broken. He was brought back to a sense of commonplace life; the reasonings of his better judgment flashed through his mind again with all the force of reaction, and once more obtained the mastery over his impulse. He formed fresh resolutions not to sacrifice future prospects to present passion—not to do in a moment what might be regretted for a lifetime. But he felt that in a matter of this kind the man who hesitated was very likely to be lost; that unless he "screwed

his courage to the sticking point," and brought the good-byeing to a speedy conclusion, his new-formed resolutions might fade away as his previous ones had so nearly done. Once more, therefore, concealing his conflict of feeling under a forced briskness of manner, and without giving himself time to pause, he said—

" Well, as I said at first, Fan, the best of friends must part; and I must be off now, for here's the cab, and trains, like time and tide, wait for no man—at least, not without he can hire a special, and that's what I can't do yet; though perhaps I shall be able some day. Who knows, Fan! I may make my fortune though I am going to London with *more* than half-a-crown in my pocket? However, I really must go. You'll hear how I get on. I shall be writing to Sandy or Harry, or some of them—and now good-bye."

So the blow fell, dashing away the cup of happiness that but a moment before had been so near her lips. She tried not to show that she was hit, but the suddenness of the thing dazed her. It was quite mechanically that, as she saw his proffered hand, she gave him her own, and uttered a faint response to his good-bye. Then, as he hastily left the house without daring to look behind him, she crept to the sofa, and, dropping on to it face downwards, began to sob as though her heart would break.

Thus her mother found her when she came in  
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some minutes later. Knowing her daughter's quiet, self-reliant character, she was astonished at the violence of her grief.

"Why, Fan, my girl, don't take on like that," she said, soothingly, as she went towards her. "Of course, my dear, you feel your own grief," she went on, getting her arm round her neck, "and I'm not going to scold you; but then, you know, Fan, sweethearts often have to part for awhile: and if any one else was to see you taking on so, they'd say what a foolish little thing you was." She paused for a minute, expecting some reply, but Fanny only continuing to sob she resumed her endeavours to calm her.

"Oh, come, come, Fan, you know this will never do," she said. "Why, Charley himself would be almost angry with you if he knew you were like this, just about him going to London. Come now, that's a dear, cheer up, and bear it like a brave little girl as you are."

She raised her head as she spoke, and then for the first time an idea of the real state of the case dawned upon her mind. She saw that there was something more than simple sorrow—something speaking of misery and despair—in the scared expression of her daughter's countenance; and her own face grew stern, and her voice became hard, as she exclaimed—"Why, Fan, what is it? What's wrong?"

"Oh, don't ask me, mother," she sobbed out;

"don't ask me. Let me go to bed for an hour or two, and then I shall be better."

"Ah, but I *will* ask you, Fan. What is it? Has he left you in the lurch after leading you on in the way he has done? If he has he's a mean scoundrel, though I say it. You didn't deserve it."

"Don't go in a passion, mother," said Fanny, glancing timidly up at her through her tears; "don't go in a passion, but—but"—and here she hesitated and drooped her head upon her mother's bosom to hide her blushes—"he parted from me as though there had never been anything between us. And after letting me show how much I cared for him—and oh, mother, I did love him—I did so love him—and don't go on against him!"

Here her utterance was choked by another fit of sobbing, and her mother broke in—"Not go on against him, indeed! Why, such a fellow as him isn't fit to live. To come here with his fair face and talk about manliness and straightforwardness, and then to turn out such a cur! It was enough to deceive anybody. I'm sure it has me as much as it has you. But there's one consolation, you're a great deal better without him, since he has proved himself to be such a scoundrel."

"Oh, don't, mother; don't, please!" pleaded Fanny, stifling her sobs by a strong effort. "I

shall be better just now. But we can't change our feelings all in a minute ; and—and I can't help it. But it hurts me to hear you speaking so about him. And now let me go and lie down."

" Oh well, Fan," said her mother, immediately softening down, " if it hurts your feelings I'll say no more about him. But don't you be downhearted, dear. You're a good girl, and deserve to do well ; and you will, never fear. You'll live to be the wife of as bright a man as ever he'd have been, if he'd turned out all that we once thought he would have done."

## CHAPTER XII.

## FORMING AN ESTABLISHMENT.

 HERE are three styles of weddings among the working classes. The first is that in which the bridegroom goes to work till breakfast time, then knocks off, changes his clothes, and quietly walks to church, where he meets the bride and her friend who have come by another route. They get married, and then separate again at the church door. The wife, who is probably a domestic, returns to her service, from which she has likely got an hour or two's leave on the plea of visiting a sick aunt; while the husband goes to work again after dinner as if nothing had happened, and without telling any one what *has* happened. There is no particular, certainly no romantic, reason for thus "keeping dark" about the marriage. It is no case of elopement, or a union in opposition to the stern commands of stony-hearted parents. There is no danger of any melodramatic interruption to the ceremony. No fear of any Alonzo-the-Brave-like incident in connexion with jilted

lovers ; or of a long-lost mother, or " poor but honest father," coming to bear away their child from the altar. Indeed, it is as likely as not that the pair are anything but children, are perhaps a fully middle-aged widower, and a cook who, whether fair or not, is certainly fat and forty. Their motive for adopting the strictly private fashion of wedding is simply to avoid fuss and expense—especially the latter.

In the second style of wedding—which is the most general—the friends of the parties know that the marriage is coming off. A few of the more intimate ones are invited to the wedding, and others asked to drop in and have a glass in the evening. The bride is attired in a manner more or less indicative of the occasion, but still in garments that will subsequently come in for ordinary wear. A bridesmaid and "best-man" accompany the bride and bridegroom, and the party walk to and from the church together—blushing, it may be, from the consciousness that every passer-by knows their errand, but decidedly not ashamed. Festivities, consisting for the most part of song-singing and the free circulation of the friendly joke and friendly glass, are kept up till a late hour at night ; and the husband does not turn up at work till after breakfast on the second day after the wedding. Then he receives the congratulations of his shopmates, and in the evening probably stands treat for them, on the strength of the

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pleasing delusion that he has been made happy for life.

The third style of marriage apes the fashionable. In it the bride is dressed in regulation costume, cheap and flimsy as to material, but correct in form and detail ; and she is attended by two or more bridesmaids, also correctly dressed. The bridal party, it is scarcely necessary to say, drive to and from the church ; and after the ceremony sit down to a sort of luncheon-dinner, which answers to the wedding-breakfast of the fashionable world ; and finally, "the happy pair" go off on a wedding trip of a week or so's duration.

Harry Mason's wedding was arranged to take place in this last style. His mother had opposed this—had advocated as a compromise, that while they should have their honeymoon trip, the actual wedding should be in the middle style. But the opposition on this point had been too strong for her.

Mrs. Fairfield was highly indignant at the mere mention of a walking wedding, and made withering allusions to the mean spirit of some people. Harry himself liked to do these sort of things with a flourish, and he knew that Kate took a carriage wedding for granted. Even the ordinary rank and file of Bentley's young ladies expected that much when they did condescend to get married ; and for Harry to have offered less

would have been an insult and injury to the general body of the young ladies as well as to Kate. In addition to this, Miss Steperson, as Kate's friend, asked that she might be allowed to give the wedding "do"—the luncheon to the bridal party, and a dance and supper to a larger circle of friends in the evening—at her house. This offer cut away a good deal of Mrs. Mason's chief objection—the expense. And guessing beside, after one or two slight skirmishes, that though Harry argued with her, he was determined to have his own road, she gave way with a good grace, and the actual preparations for the wedding commenced.

Large numbers of the less educated and more reckless of the working classes get married with no other preparation in the shape of a home than a single miserable apartment, which has to serve them—and subsequently, the numerous progeny with which such marriages are usually cursed—as eating, sleeping, and dwelling-room. But the ambition of the more enlightened portions of those classes is to have a comfortable little home of their own to step into when they are married. This latter is especially the case in the smaller provincial towns, and as we have stated was considered "the thing" in Stonebury. As a rule, the intending Benedick is supposed to find the money, or credit, for establishing the home; but the actual work of forming and

getting it in order is—when the circumstances of the case admit of it—left to the mothers of the contracting parties. Looking, however, at the spirit in which she had debated his matrimonial plans, Harry Mason entertained but small hopes of service from his mother in this respect. But herein he miscalculated.

Though her consent to the marriage had been reluctantly yielded—had been the result not of approval but of the force of circumstances—though now that she had consented, she still continued to entertain grave doubts as to the wisdom of the match or the chances of its turning out a happy one; notwithstanding all this, she entered upon the preparations for housing and settling the young couple as upon a labour of love. She was too thoroughly a woman not to do this. For her, as for most of her sex, shopping and house-hunting had powerful attractions, and nothing afforded so much pleasant excitement in this way as the carrying out of the arrangements for a marriage. On this ground alone she would have delighted in the work of preparation, though she had also more special reasons for joining in it with an eagerness that in a great measure kept disquieting thoughts in abeyance. She wished to engage her daughter in the work with a view to cheering and rousing her, for it was plain that she, too, had disquieting thoughts—thoughts such as pain and

sadden a loving heart, and to a young one seem to take the bloom out of life. Since the day on which Charley Thompson had left Stonebury Fanny had made no reference to him. After the first outburst of grief she had gone on with her work as usual, and striven to appear cheerful. But though she was strong to endure—though she bore her sufferings uncomplainingly and tried hard to conceal them—it was evident that she did suffer. She grew pale and thin, her manner became listless, her smile lost its brightness, and, worse than all, she brooded over her sorrow. From constant practice much of her work had become so merely mechanical to her as to make no call upon her mental faculties. She could think as she worked, and she did so day after day for weary hours at a stretch. While her fingers were busy with the needle, her thoughts dwelt sadly on her ill-requited love—a love so deep and strong, so simply and spontaneously love, apart from vanity, pride (of self), or worldly calculation, that the slight put upon it had neither extinguished it nor turned it to hatred of the slighter. Her love lay bleeding, but it still survived. It was too deep rooted to be killed even by such a wound as Charley Thompson had inflicted upon it, and she could not bring herself to think harshly of him, though others did.

Her brother referred triumphantly to the opinions—made prophetic by the course of events

—he had expressed concerning Charley's attentions to her; while others who had never expressed any opinion at all about the matter also adopted the "I-told-you-so" tone in condemning Charley's part in it. His enemies of course said they were not surprised; that it was just like him—just what might have been expected, and his friends could not defend him. Miss Steperson said that she couldn't have thought Charley would have been so unmanly; while the Dauntless Three were unanimously of opinion that, "Hang it! you know, it wasn't the cheese; wouldn't have been the cheese even with don't-care-ish girls like them; and with Little Dimples was too bad altogether." Even his most intimate shopmates—mostly young fellows of his own standing, and holding the same general views concerning marriage—even they, speaking of his proceedings, said, "Well, when all was said and done, it wasn't right of him. He was Harry's mate, and used to go about his mother's house, and there was no mistake about his having been after the sister, or her being a steady, respectable little girl, who shouldn't have been served so"—and so they decided that it wasn't right. But none of his younger mates were so emphatically down upon him as old Sandy Grant, but then none of the younger ones were in love with Fanny. Sandy's love for her—though he never told it and she never guessed it

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—had increased rather than abated in intensity since they had first met, for she, in unconsciousness of the evil she was doing by her unrestrained, confiding manner towards him, fed the flame. While, however, this being the case, he rejoiced that Charley had broken with her, he was very bitter against him for the manner in which he had done it, as he could see how Fanny's heart had been wrung. He, like Mrs. Mason, spoke of the recreant lover as a scoundrel ; and when, a week after he had left Stonebury, Charley wrote to him, he returned the letter with one from himself intimating in very strong terms that he wished to have no further acquaintance with him. When he had done this he had fully expected that Charley would then have written to some one else in the town, but his expectation was not realized, and somehow or other he never mentioned the circumstance. As far as any one else knew, Charley had finally shaken the dust of Stonebury from off his feet, and severed all connexion with the dwellers therein ; and sharing this belief Fanny felt another pang added to her sufferings. Apart from what he had said about writing when parting with her, she had not thought he would have the heart to so completely bury the happy past as he seemed to have done.

The only being who had a word to say in palliation of Charley's misdeed was Kate Fair-

field, who made a pretty near guess at the motives by which he had been influenced. "It was cruel of him, certainly," she said to Harry, who had forced the subject upon her, and in doing so had sneered his worst at Charley; "very cruel, and especially to such a loving little girl as Fan. But, after all," she went on in a qualifying tone, "I can't help thinking that his behaviour looks worse than it really was—or at any rate than it was meant to be. I fancy that if he knew how much Fan was cut up by it, he would be as much cut up for having done it; and for my own part I wouldn't be a bit surprised if some of these odd days he was to come back all of a sudden and make everything right again."

"Oh, indeed!" exclaimed Harry, with as much of a sneer as he liked to venture upon with her, for he was thoroughly annoyed that she, of all others, should have said even this much in extenuation of Charley's conduct. "Oh, indeed! so you think that he's such a tremendously fascinating being, that he has only to come back to make it all right again if he wishes—has only got to throw the handkerchief, for Fan—or, I suppose you mean, any other girl he might choose to honour—to run and pick it up?"

"Well, sweethearts' quarrels often are made up, you know," she said, deprecatingly.

"Quarrels, yes!" he answered; "but this

wasn't a quarrel. It takes two to make a quarrel ; and he threw her off without even pretending that there was the slightest fault on her part—threw her off, knowing how she loved him, and that he had done all that a man could do to lead her to believe that her love was returned. Why, if I thought Fan wouldn't scorn the idea of ever again speaking to such a mean hound, I'd disown her!"

It was a fine enough outburst, but scarcely honest, being directed far more against the man for whom he still had a vague suspicion Kate entertained a feeling a little more than kind, than against the faithless lover of his sister. But Fanny we know was not, in the usual sense of the term, a high-spirited girl. Her feeling had nothing in it of scorn and resentment towards Charley. It was not revenge, but love she sighed for—the love that had been ruthlessly withdrawn from her, and with which her own had been so entwined that the withdrawal had left an aching void in her heart, and made her young life seem dreary to her.

Her mother saw how she sorrowed, and though she knew that time was the only sure consoler, she also believed that its operations in this respect might be accelerated by a little excitement and change of habit, and in her daughter's case these were offered by the work of organizing an establishment for Harry. This, independent

of the general womanly love for such work was, as we have said, a strong incentive to Mrs. Mason for joining in it ; and she had yet another reason, the spirit of the mother-in-law was already rising within her.

As woman is (very often erroneously in the case of married couples) taken to be the weaker vessel, and stands at a disadvantage in point of law ; and as mothers of girls about to be married go upon the principle that the husband to be may turn out a brute, and is more likely than not to do so when he has secured his prey, the mother-in-lawish feeling is generally experienced most strongly on their side. This feeling generally begins to display itself in the carrying out of the arrangements for the marriage ; for wise in their generation, the mothers know that an infatuated lover will be yielding where a more or less disenchanted husband might be hard of heart. In the upper ranks of life, I suppose it is to securing satisfactory settlements for their daughters that mothers turn their attention ; among the working classes it is to having the chief "say" in the furnishing of the household for the young couple. In this respect the mother of the girl has a decided advantage in the fact that most of the courting goes on in her house. She has ample opportunities for instilling her views into the lover's mind ; for hinting that Polly can't get on without, or would like, or has

been used to this, that, or the other thing, and for obtaining a thoughtless sanction to her own plans.

But while the mother-in-law—the terrible being who is so frequently the evil genius of a household—is generally on the wife's side, the rule is sometimes reversed, when, as in Mrs. Mason's instance, the mother on the male side thinks that her son is going to make a fool of himself, and be made a tool of by the relations of his intended wife. Believing that this was really about the state of affairs in Harry's case, the wish to save him as far as she could from what she considered his own folly, and the petty knavery of the elder Fairfields—whom she knew by reputation—was a strong motive in addition to those already cited for her taking an interest in the practical preparations for the match,—an interest which, in its enthusiasm, might, apart from such considerations, have seemed utterly inconsistent with her general views concerning the match. Since she could not prevent the evil, she thought she might as well enjoy the little incidental good that came from it. As her son *would* marry, she desired to have a leading hand in setting up his household, and circumstances favoured her desire, the fact that Fanny was going to lend the money necessary for furnishing giving her “a pull.”

“Look here, Fan,” she said to her one day,

shortly after it had been settled that she was to advance the funds, “ Harry will be wanting that money from you all in a lump, but if I was you I wouldn’t let him have it. I think that as you are finding it and will have to stand out of it for a good while, and perhaps not get it back at all, we ought at least to have the laying of it out.”

“ As to waiting for it or anything of that kind I wouldn’t care so much,” said Fanny ; “ but seeing what sort of a woman Mrs. Fairfield is—not that you can blame her much, poor thing, seeing what sort of a husband she’s got—I think that it would be better for you to have the spending of it.”

“ Well, that’s a good deal how I meant. If them lot got hold of him with it, they’d borrow half of it, and get him to squander the rest in a lot of Brummagem things as wouldn’t be useful, and as nobody but the likes of them would think ornamental. But I should want you to come with me : it would do you good, and learn you a thing or two.”

Charley had gone then, and Fanny understood the kindly meaning which underlay this latter part of her mother’s speech ; and more from a wish to respond to the feelings that prompted the suggestion than from any belief that the thing would really tend to dispel her grief, she agreed to it.

"Oh yes, I would like to go with you well enough," she said; "but of course we'd have to take Mrs. Fairfield with us too: it would hurt her feelings if we didn't."

"Oh yes, she could come if she wanted," answered Mrs. Mason, in a contemptuous tone. "That wouldn't matter much, so long as we held the purse. People who do that generally get their own way. And, speaking of that, we'll take Kate with us. Right is right in everything; and it will be her house as well as Harry's; and though I ought to know better than her, I'd be quite agreeable for her to have a real say in it whatever I might think about her mother interfering too far."

On this principle the matter was settled, and despite one or two attempts upon Harry's part to persuade her to hand over the money to him, Fanny stuck to the arrangement.

From motives of economy a house could not be taken till within a week of the marriage, but in the meantime houses to let were looked out and examined, and, as usual in house-hunting, the characters of their last inhabitants discussed by the light of the condition in which they had left them; for to female eyes even empty houses furnish evidences of the style of housekeeping that has prevailed in them. Furniture dealers were visited too, and prices ascertained and compared; and sales were attended, and (presumed) bargains

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picked up and stored for the present with the Masons. By this sort of skirmishing the time was pleasantly enlivened till the week came round for the campaign proper. During that week they were, in Mrs. Mason's phrase, "up to the eyes in the business," the result of their labours being that by the end of the week they had set forth a completely furnished little household, such as any young couple in the working-class ranks of life might be proud of.

In the earlier shopping expeditions Mrs. Mason and Mrs. Fairfield came in contact for the first time, and they were a good deal together while the work of forming an establishment for their children was going on ; but, as might have been expected, they did not impress each other very favourably.

When the day's house or bargain hunting was over, they generally returned to Mason's to tea ; but two or three times the adjournments were to Fairfield's, and on those occasions Mrs. Mason had keenly taken stock of the borrowing, scheming, and mismanagement going on there. After these visits, Mrs. Fairfield was conscious that many of the remarks ostensibly applied to people who had left dwellings in a state indicative of slovenly, uncleanly housekeeping, were really side hints at herself. Further she felt that from the commencement of the acquaintance she had been rather ruthlessly put down whenever she had

offered advice in the matter of a purchase. For this she disliked Mrs. Mason, and rightly guessed that there was no love lost between them. They were quite civil to each other—indeed, rather excruciatingly so—but the civility was simply conventional, as each had a perfectly accurate guess of what the other thought of them, and both knew that such was the case. Their impressions were very well summed up in the pieces of advice they gave to their son and daughter respectively on the eve of their marriage.

"Kate, my dear, when you are married," said her mother, "don't let any one drum-major over you. You begin as you mean to end; be missus in your own house, and let people see that you mean to be so, no matter who they are. I mention no names, but there's some people as, because they're always a scrubbing and flustering about, thinks no one else knows how to look after a house; but if any of that sort comes bothering you, tell 'em at once that they'd better stick to their house and you will to yours."

To Harry his mother's counsel was:—"When you go into your own house, my lad, see that you keep it your own. Be as neighbourly as you like in a fair give-and-take way, but keep clear of people that have all the take and none of the give on their side. People that, if they could, would borrow the clothes off your back after you'd

lent them all you'd got in your box. That would live on you altogether if you'd let 'em!—use your furniture, eat you out of house and home, and then think it was a pity they couldn't eat you. If you should come across any of this kind, you watch them, and don't mind about being a little rough in shaking them off. Holdfast is their nature, whatever their name may happen to be, and they're not at all touchy. Cold shoulder wont stall them off; a bit of tongue hot, so hot as there can be no mistake about it, is the thing for them; and they sometimes require more than one serving of that. I name no one, but still there are such people about, and so I warn you."

"Well, you've no need to name any one for me to know what you mean," replied Harry, with a good-humoured smile, on the conclusion of his mother's tirade. "But though there's a good deal of truth in what you say, I think you go too far. Kate's people have been greatly reduced in circumstances, and I suppose poverty has driven them to even worse shifts than it might have done if they'd never known anything else. Still they're fond of their daughter, and as they couldn't well hurt me without hurting her at the same time, I think I'm pretty safe."

"Ah, but perhaps they wont see things in that way. There's no mistake about self being the

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first law of nature with them sort ; get to-day, and never mind who suffers to-morrow, is their motto. However, there's no use saying any more about it now ; if it should come to the pinch, you've always the remedy in your own hands if you know how to apply it."

She was sitting by the fireside, with her son and daughter beside her, and Harry making no further reply, they all sat silent for some minutes ; and then, with a wonderful softness of expression on her face, tears standing in her eyes, and her voice trembling in her efforts to keep from sobbing, the mother spoke again—

" Harry, my own lad," she said, " for you are my own lad to-night, though you'll be somebody else's to-morrow, whenever I've spoke anything about your marrying like what I did just now, I meant it for your good. Believe me I did, Harry : I thought what I was saying was right, but I do hope now it wasn't. I'd a million million times rather see myself mistaken and beg everybody's pardon, than that you should be unhappy for a moment. You know I would, my lad—you know I would. Don't you, Harry ?"

" Of course I do, mother. I never thought otherwise," he answered.

" Indeed, indeed I would," she said, now fairly sobbing despite her efforts at self-control. " There's no one wishes you better or loves you more than Fan here and I."

"That I'm sure there isn't, God bless you both!" he answered, kissing them. Then he turned away, lest the water that had gathered in his own eyes should be seen in tears on his cheek.

## BOOK III.

*Disenchantment and Fall.*

## CHAPTER I.

## WEDDED.



HE fashionable style of wedding being decided upon, Fanny Mason and Nelly Gibbons were selected as bridesmaids; but though, at Harry's request, Sandy Grant consented to accompany them to church, Georgey Clayton was at his (Sandy's) suggestion asked to be best man. Georgey, who was a moderate disciple of the knock-about school, had—being then out of his time—left Stonebury a few weeks before Charley Thompson, and was working as a journeyman in Liverpool. But being now formally engaged to Nelly Gibbons, he was coming to Stonebury for his Christmas holidays, and wrote to say that nothing would please him better than to have a hand in what he called the tying-up business, as it might help to harden him against it came to his own turn to be knotted.

There was a sort of tacit agreement that Kate's father could not be trusted to give her away. In a waiter's dress he would have been passably presentable, but then at such a time there would necessarily be refreshments about, and it was known that if he got at them—and his best endeavours would be directed to that end—he would be certain to help himself to them, not wisely, but too copiously. Would be sure to get maudlin or obstreperous, as his humour might happen to be or the drink direct, and be much more likely than not to introduce some unpleasant novelty into the performance of the ceremony. Under the plea, therefore, of ill-health—a plea in which he was brought to acquiesce in consideration of sundry bribes of pints or the prices thereof—he was shelved, old Percy Steperson undertaking to supply his place.

The marriage of the Queen of Bentley's needle-drivers was, in a small way, an event in Stonebury. Since it had been known as a settled thing, it had formed a prominent topic of discourse in the circles in which Kate moved, and on the wedding morning a considerable crowd was waiting around the doors of the church to witness the arrival of the bridal party—a crowd made up of neighbours of the Fairfields and Masons, relatives of the young ladies engaged in the millinery and other genteel shops of the town, a number of general idlers, and a few boys from

the railway works, who, in their anxiety to see Harry Mason worked off, had run the workshop blockade. The bride, when she came, was received with a half-cheer of admiration ; but it must be confessed that, with that irreverence for the proprieties which characterizes their class, the boys rather chaffed the bridegroom. He looked nervous, and from this they took their cue.

"Don't be frightened, Harry ; it's not very painful, and wont last above five minutes," shouted one of them. Another, whose ideas of the marriage service were evidently confused, advised him, with a mock-serious air, to bear it like a man, and give his mind to it, or else he would be forgetting his catechism. This led to another hoping that he had not forgotten the ring, and offering to run back for it if he had ; while a fourth called out to Clayton, "Bite his ear, Georgey, if you see him going to faint." And the set being in this humour, a fifth, who had not had time to cut in while their victim was within hearing, proceeded to amuse his companions by singing snatches of a popular song, the refrain of which ran—

" Then she reckoned up and told him,  
And told him quite complete,  
How the eight-and-twenty shillings  
Were expended in a week."

The substance of the song, as the above chorus indicates, being a narrative of how a recently-

married woman, being accused of extravagance, metaphorically annihilates her husband by replying in detail to his question as to how the money goes.

Inside the church were a number of the young ladies from Bentley's and the other leading shops in the town, who had treated themselves to a half-day's holiday specially to witness the marriage of so prominent a member of their own class; a few of those old and middle-aged maidens who habitually attend weddings—not, I believe, as I have often heard argued, in a spleenetic spirit, or from a desire to see people make fools of themselves—but because that is the nearest approach they can make to a paradise from which they are shut-out peris; some half-dozen of the young loafers of Abbotsgate, and about double that number of miscellaneous spectators. The whispered verdict of this congregation was, that the entire turn-out of the wedding was very nice, and that Kate looked lovely—as indeed she did. Her white silk dress was, of course, a cheap one; one which any of the young ladies looking on would have told you was as cottony as anything to be called silk well could be; and her veil was only machine-made Nottingham lace. But still the dress had a sheen upon it, and fitted well to her graceful figure, and the veil fell around her in soft, well-arranged folds. From an artistic point of view,

they were to the full as effective as though they had been made of the costliest material. Attired in them, with orange blossoms and white roses twined in her dark-brown hair, and her cheeks flushed and eyes brightened with excitement, she looked a strikingly beautiful bride.

Fanny, too, though her face had lost something of its roundness, looked very pretty in her own style; and there were others in the church beside Georgey Clayton who thought that Nelly Gibbons made a specially handsome bridesmaid.

Georgey himself was quite resplendent. He "sported" patent-leather boots, white kid gloves, dress shirt and tie, gold studs, and a small bouquet in his button-hole. But it must be confessed that the cut of his main garments was much more horsey than it need have been, or than most people would have considered in good taste. His coat was very much cut away, very short in the tails and very broadly bound, and had an unusual number of pockets and extent of pocket flap, while his trousers fitted him so tightly that, as one of the Abbotsgate loafers whispered to another, "he might have been born in them."

Old Percy Steperson's costume was a sort of combination of the fine-old-English-gentleman and undress-cavalry-officer styles.

A hypercritical looker-on might have been of opinion that it, as well as Georgey's, was more

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remarkable for loudness than taste, consisting as it did of a blue surtout coat with gilt buttons, buff waistcoat, and light trousers with a broad black stripe down the side, and tightly strapped over very high-heeled boots.

Beside these two, Sandy Grant, in his Sunday suit of black, made a slightly sombre appearance and attracted but little notice—of which last circumstance he was very glad.

Harry, who, after Kate, was the observed of all observers, was quietly and becomingly dressed in black frock coat, black trousers, and white waistcoat, and presented a very gentlemanly appearance. He was evidently much flurried during the progress of the ceremony, but he was as evidently very happy and very proud of his bride; any one who looked at his beaming face could see that.

While the wedding party were at church, luncheon was arranged for them by Miss Steperson, assisted by Mrs. Fairfield and Mrs. Mason.

The latter lady, it may be mentioned, after this day spoke of Miss Steperson as a “real good-hearted sort at bottom, for all her fal-de-ral ways in some things.” Not because she had given her son’s “wedding do,” but because she had spoken in kindly praise of her daughter.

“Well, I never saw her but the once, Mrs. Mason,” she said, on Fanny’s name being incidentally mentioned; “but I’ve heard a good

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deal about her, and know what a good, self-denying little girl she's been ; and that night she was here I could see what a loving, true-hearted one she was. There was nothing half-and-half about her—no flirting, or disguise, or mock-modesty. Her face spoke honestly ; any one could tell how her heart lay ; and I can assure you I was very sorry to hear of the way in which she has been treated. If I could do anything to help to make her forget it, I should be very glad. And speaking of that, do you think it would help to pass the time a bit now and again if she was to drop in on me ? We could have a cup of tea and a chat together, or I could take her out for a drive if she liked, and wasn't afraid of her chapel friends seeing her with such a dreadful creature as I suppose they think me."

" Well, no one, either chapel or not chapel, had better say anything against you to me after this," Mrs. Mason answered, warmly. " I can tell when a face speaks honestly too, miss ; I know you mean what you say, and I take it very kind of you, and I'll never forget it. I think it would do Fan good on other accounts beside this one if she would go out more and make acquaintances. She has always had to work hard enough, poor girl, goodness knows. There isn't many of her age that have seen as much trouble, and behaved as well under it as she's done ; and now that things are going pretty well with her, I think

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she ought to enjoy herself more than she does. But she's shy and backward about going among strangers at most times ; and, bless you ! if she thought you were asking her out just because of the way she was served by that blackguard—for after the way he behaved I can't call him anything else—she wouldn't come at all, and would be put out by the asking. You can see she is cut up, but she doesn't want people to think so ; she's high-spirited enough in that way."

" Well, I'll tell you how that could be managed," said Miss Steperson. " I'm going to ask Kate to spend an afternoon with me when she comes back from the wedding trip, and Fanny could come with her, and Harry call for them in the evening ; there wouldn't look anything special about that. The fact is, I quite took to Fan that night she was dancing here, she enjoyed herself so much, and was so hearty and open about it. And then, with having heard so much about her since from Kate and others (she did not care about naming Charley Thompson), I feel that I should like to know her, and I'm sure we'll get on all right if we once come together. However, we'll see," she concluded, as some things for the luncheon for which they had been waiting while this discourse took place were brought in by a neighbouring confectioner under the guidance of Mrs. Fairfield.

Mrs. Mason murmured something about Miss

Steperson being very good to make such an offer, and hoped Fanny would be agreeable to it for her own sake; and then the laying out of the table went on, and the banquet was fully prepared when the wedding guests arrived.

Working-men, as they come before other sections of the community in connexion with the trade and other movements in association with which they mostly do come before the public, may appear to be very much given to speech-making, but such is not the case. They admire the faculty of speech-making, but as a rule they do not possess it, and perhaps that is why they do admire it. The working-men who speechify are exceptions in that respect, whether happily so or not is of course a matter of opinion. In social matters speech-making, in the generally understood sense of the term, is almost unknown even in connexion with those events with which a little speech-making is usually associated in other ranks of life. Thus in imitating the fashionable style of wedding they omit the part of formally proposing the health of the bride and bridegroom. Each person, on taking their first glass, may at will add a few words to the "Here's luck to you," or "Here's wishing you happiness," with which they drink to the "happy pair;" but the health of the pair is not proposed in any set speech. But old Steperson would not allow this omission at the wedding feast at his house. As

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a professional organizer of festivities he was well versed upon such points as these, and rather stickled for full ceremonial. When, therefore, some of the guests began to "wish healths" in the hob-nobbing style just referred to, he courteously put his *veto* upon it, and called upon Georgey Clayton to propose the toast of the day in due form.

Georgey was rather taken aback by this, and his first idea was to ask to be excused. But noticing the amused smile with which the others (who he knew were aware that he plumed himself upon being a cool card) regarded his embarrassment, he determined to "try it on." With a good-humoured shake of the head, which meant, "Mind you're not crowing too soon; I'm not beaten yet," he rose to his feet, and commenced—

"Ladies and gentlemen,—I rise to propose the health of the bride and bridegroom. You see I come straight to the point, for this sort of thing is not at all in my way, even if I had had time to train for it, and coming on me like this it's a bit of a flooder; and if I got trying to do the flowery, I should likely make a mull of it altogether. However, there's this in it, when I say to them—as I do now—here's wishing you health, wealth, and prosperity, long life and posterity, I mean it all, and that's perhaps more than I could say of a lot of high-flying talk. ['Hear, hear,'

from old Steperson.] What's more, I'm sure every one here wishes them as well as I do ; and when they remember that, I'm sure they'll say to themselves 'never mind the rest.' ['Hear, hear,' from Harry.] As to Kate—I don't know whether it's the thing to call her Kate now, but if it isn't she'll excuse me—I'll only say, look at her." He came to a dead stop at this point, and waved his hand towards her, and the others almost involuntarily following his motion with their eyes, Kate was made to blush and they to laugh. "It's no use saying I wish every young fellow had as lovely a wife," he resumed, "because I know there ain't many such lovely girls about. But I will say that if I wasn't dreadfully far gone in another quarter" (here he tried to wink at the general company with one side of his face, and smile on Nelly with the other), "and was to drop across such another girl, I should be inclined to tell her 'I'd crowns resign' —that is, if I had 'em—"to call thee mine, sweet rose of Allendale.' Not that we might be in Allendale, wherever it is, but you know how I mean." [General affirmative applause.]

"As to Harry here," he went on, now pointing to him, "we served our apprenticeship together, and I can say that he's just the style of young fellow to make a wife happy. He is steady, sober, and clever, and in scholarship and that sort of thing is far before most of his standing. In fact, it's my opinion he knows enough to bring

him on in the world. As the chap in the play says, ‘ It’s not in mortals to command success ;’ at any rate, if it is, the mortal that has found it out keeps it dark. But as the play goes on to say ‘ if we can’t command it we may deserve it,’ and without wishing to flatter Harry, I think he’s one of those that deserve to get on. When other young fellows were roaming about in the evening enjoying themselves he was hard at work improving himself. And though to deserve success is not to get it, it’s often a good step towards it ; and though again, success by itself isn’t happiness, it’s a tidy big plum in the pudding. But for all this there’s no reason why a working-man that has a good wife, is in regular work, and can enjoy a book, should not be happy as a king. [‘ Hear hear ! Georgey,’ from Sandy Grant.] So while wishing happiness to Mr. and Mrs. Mason, I’m glad to say that there’s every prospect of our wish coming to pass. And now, all hands, charge your glasses and drink with me, ‘ Long life and happiness to the bride and bridegroom ! ’ ”

Georgey’s speech had been jerky throughout, and at times slightly incoherent, but upon the whole it was considered effective, and the toast was drunk with all desirable applause.

Being one of the exceptional working-men who had a talent for speech making, Harry Mason replied to the toast at considerable length, and

in that quotation-studded, metaphorically illustrated style which Clayton had intended to indicate when he spoke of the flowery. Of course he said that he was "but little happy if he could say how much," but still he managed to say a good deal upon the point. He spoke of himself as being, in his own estimation, at that moment literally the happiest man in the world. He dwelt upon the simplicity and comparatively easy attainability of the essentials of happiness, first of which he counted a good wife. At the same time he acknowledged, in such an artificial state of society as ours, there are accessories almost as important as essentials, and he quite agreed with Mr. Clayton that success was one of the most desirable of them. "He was afraid," he concluded, in an unconsciously patronizing tone, "that he scarcely deserved all the kind things his friends had said of him in relation to this question of success, but this much he would say, that whatever might be his future lot he would never forget that his best friends were his early ones; those whom with all his heart he now thanked for the hearty manner in which they had received the health of his wife and self."

Old Steperson gave the health of the ladies, and Clayton, who laughingly expressed himself desirous of plunging on speech-making now that he had got his hand in, returned thanks on their behalf.

By this was over it was time for the happy pair to make ready to start for London, a week's sight-seeing in the metropolis being the form of honeymoon trip they had decided upon. There was a good deal of kissing and a little crying upon the part of the women, and then Harry and his wife drove off amid a general waving of handkerchiefs and kissing of hands.

In the evening those invited to the dance and supper duly put in an appearance, and among them Mr. Parker, who was still regarded as a friend of Kate, Charley Thompson having kept his own counsel as to the little episode that had occurred on the long-quadrille night. That night, which had proved such a momentous one to the more prominent personages of our story, had also been a memorable one to Mr. Parker. After Charley had come down upon him he had remained in the public-house some time punishing the drink, and in the morning the drink had punished him—had punished him so severely that he had been fain to send out one of the porters for a reviver in the shape of brandy and soda-water; but one of the firm detecting the porter in smuggling it into the shop, Mr. Parker was immediately discharged and ceased to be one of Bentley's young gentlemen. A day or two after his dismissal, however, he ascertained that a tallyman who had made sufficient money by his business to take a good sized shop in the town,

was about to put his "round" in the market ; and knowing that as he could not now apply to Bentley's for a character, it would be almost impossible for him to obtain employment again as a shopman, he entered into negotiations for and with the assistance of friends with a little money was enabled to conclude the purchase of the round.

Now between tallymen and Bentley's shopmen it need scarcely be said a great gulf of gentility was fixed, and considering that he had altogether lost caste by entering on the tally line, Mr. Parker's companions were prepared to cut him. But the round he had bought was a good one, the circle of customers being mostly the genteelly inclined wives of clerks, mechanics, and small tradesmen, who generally paid in the long run—paid such prices as were highly profitable, even though their run was literally a long one. With this class of customers his Bentley manner stood him in good stead. They said he was such a nice genteel young man, and gave him orders, and the shopman fraternity finding that he was making a good thing out of his new business—a better thing so far as money went than his situation in Bentley's had been—and could still dress as well as any of them, and stand treat oftener than most of them, said to one another, " After all, you know, he's a pushing fellow, and not a bad sort." So the partially offered cold shoulder

was withdrawn, and though a tallyman, he continued to mingle with the swell shopmen, and was still somebody among the set who frequented Steperson's dancing assemblies.

Most of this set were now present, and the chief topic of discourse among them was naturally the wedding. It was unanimously pronounced an entire success—as far as it had gone. But there seemed to be an under-current of doubt as to the marriage ultimately turning out a very happy one; none expressing this doubt so explicitly and sneeringly as did Mr. Parker.

"Well, yes," he said, agreeing to the remark of a companion with whom he was discussing the subject; "they've made a dashing start, and if they could only keep on as dashingly it would be all right, but as they can't, even the start was a mistake. It was just as much *too* dashing as it was above the pace they can go as a regular thing—and that was a lot. You learn a thing or two in the business I'm at now. I know what thirty shillings a week and genteel notions means. Sometimes it means very queer things, and at the best it means such a scrambling scheming style of life, that when the bold Kate comes to find it out she'll have very good reason to think she's gone out of the frying-pan into the fire, for, from all I can hear, she's married as much to get away from that hopeful father and mother of hers as anything else. When all this fuss is over,

and they get fairly settled down, she'll discover she's taken her eggs to the wrong market."

"It wont be much use finding it out then," said the other.

"Oh, I don't know," answered Mr. Parker, with a significant leer; "it's always open to any one to make the best of a bad bargain. She might be willing to deal in another market then, don't you see?"

But his friend not seeming to appreciate this style of remark, he let the matter drop.

Others merely, and in no unfriendly spirit, expressed themselves doubtfully as to whether Kate was "cut out for this kind of thing, you know," or suggested that, as there seemed to be an excess of fondness upon Harry's part, he would be likely to let her have more of her own way than would be good for either of them.

When Nelly Gibbons mentioned the doubts that were going about to Georgey Clayton, even that young gentleman spoke in a slightly qualified tone—"Oh, I don't know, Nelly," he said, in a half-earnest, half-jesting way. "I don't see why they shouldn't do very well. Of course, if a fellow is tremendously spoony on a girl, like I am on you, she can do anything with him; but in a general way I can tell you Harry is just the fellow to take care that he isn't injured by any one—even by his wife. Besides, Kate must know that she'll have to alter her style now.

Though there's this in it: I do think it would have been better if he'd been going to take her a hundred miles away. When people are going into a new line it's best to begin on altogether fresh ground; there's less danger then of running into the old grooves. In fact, when old grooves are near it's very hard to keep out of them; and when they don't suit the new line, as would be the case with Kate, that makes it bad."

Mrs. Mason stayed to help Miss Steperson with the supper, but Sandy Grant and Fanny left the party early in the evening, before the dancers began to arrive. Dancing was altogether out of Sandy's line, and after her brother had gone Fanny had not seemed to be in very good spirits.

"Wont you stop a little while and just have the first one or two dances?" Miss Steperson asked her, pausing in arranging a shawl over her bridesmaid's dress.

"No, thank you, Miss Steperson, I'd rather not to-night," she answered.

"Well then, you must come and see me some other time. Come with Kate some afternoon when she comes back. Will you?"

"Well, I should like that better."

"Very well then, we'll fix the time when we see Kate. But are you quite sure you wouldn't like to stay and have a dance?"

"You're very kind, but I wouldn't care about

it now," Fanny answered, and as she spoke a look that was partly a blush, partly an expression of pain, came over her face.

Noticing this look Miss Steperson, who was in the act of fastening the shawl at the neck, suddenly swooped down upon her with a kiss and exclaimed, "There, forgive me, dear! I ought to have known better, but I didn't think of it. But don't be down-hearted. You should try to forget those who forget you. If they didn't know your value perhaps there's others that do. And speaking of that," she concluded, smiling significantly, "I had better not keep you any longer, or Mr. Grant will be getting jealous."

Fanny was so confused by it being guessed that her distaste to stay to the dance on this occasion arose from the recollection of the night on which she had been there with Charley Thompson, that the meaning of Miss Steperson's last remark, obvious as it was, did not strike her, and it was simply with a feeling of relief that she found herself in the cab beside Sandy.

She leaned back in her seat with a sigh that caused Sandy to ask—"Aren't you well, Fanny?"

"Oh yes," she answered. "What made you ask?"

"Well, because you sighed just now, and you've seemed rather out of sorts this last hour or two."

"Well, as far as that goes," she said, with a

little forced laugh, "I really feel out of sorts. I suppose it's excitement or nervousness, or something of that kind ; but do you know, ever since Harry went away I've felt as if he was lost to me ; felt somehow as if I wanted to be with him to stand between him and something that was going to happen. It's very foolish of me, isn't it ?"

While she had been speaking Sandy had been sliding his arm, not exactly around her waist, but along the back of the seat, in such a position that he had only to bring it forward to encircle her, and he began to draw it timidly around her as he answered—

"Well, many people would think it so, Fanny, but I can only say that I would give the world if—if some one could be foolish in that sense about me."

"Well, it is a little foolish though, after all," said Fanny, who, if she made any movement, rather gave way to than withdrew from the slight but unmistakable embrace in which Sandy now held her. "Of course I've no reason to suppose that anything is going to happen, and even if there was, a wife could look after him better than a sister."

"No one could look after him more lovingly than you," murmured Sandy, tightening his embrace. "You've been the making of him, as you would be of any man you loved, and I'm sure

that in the future, if I can help or advise your brother——”

“ You’ll do it,” said Fanny, letting her head fall gently on his shoulder, “ for my sake.”

“ For your sake, yes,” he said tenderly ; “ that or anything for love of you, Fan,” and as he spoke he drew her face towards his and kissed her.

Then she knew that he loved her—loved her not merely in a friendly way, but as a lover—and the knowledge gave rise to a curious mixture of feelings in her breast. The predominating sensation was surprise—surprise that the thing should be ; and still greater surprise that she had not discovered it before. Then came a distracting feeling of wonder at the coincidence of this second declaration taking place in a cab going home from Steperson’s, but the only throb of passion that mingled with these tamer feelings arose from the memories which this last train of thought brought flashing upon her. But if Sandy’s avowal of love elicited no passionate response either from her lips or in her heart, it gave her a calmer sense of happiness—a sense of protection and support and rest. She was silent, but as she still sat locked in his arms making no effort to withdraw herself, Sandy counted her silence as the silence of consent, and was himself made voiceless by excess of love and happiness. Not another word was spoken till they got to

her mother's door, and when on bidding her good night there, he kissed her again, the bright little domestic "interior" he had before conjured up once more rose before him, and now it no longer seemed the mere dream picture it had previously done. Sandy was not an artist of the Claude Melnotte school. The home he had painted—could love fulfil its prayers—had not been a palace rising to eternal summers, but a cosy cottage with Fanny as its home angel. His painting had contemplated not an Italian summer, but an English winter; and instead of perfumed lights, alabaster lamps, orange groves, and murmuring fountains, he merely pictured a cheerful fireside, with Fanny and himself ensconced on either side of it, and perhaps a bright-eyed child of their own gambolling over the rug between them. A very unromantic picture, you see, but at the time he had first imagined it, it had seemed almost as impossible of attainment as any Claude Melnotte-ish fancy would have been. But now it might be realized, and the thought was ecstatically blissful to Sandy, who looked upon that picture—commonplace as it might appear to others—as the embodiment of the earthly paradise.

## CHAPTER II.

**HARRY PROMOTES A COMPANY.**

N the dusk of a clear frosty day in the beginning of January, Harry Mason and his wife returned from their wedding jaunt, and landed at their own home, where they were welcomed by his mother and sister, and found a bright fire and comfortable tea awaiting them. They all had tea together, and shortly afterwards Mrs. Mason and Fanny took their departure, and man and wife were for the first time alone together under their own roof-tree.

For some minutes they sat in silence, and then Harry observed, in a musing tone—

“Ah, well, dear, I suppose this is what we may call the end of the beginning. Heré we are by our ain fire-side, and, in the popular phrase, fairly settled.”

“Well, yes, I suppose so,” Kate answered, smiling; “and I must ‘buckle-to,’ as your mother calls it.”

“Well, of course we must both ‘buckle-to’

in our respective ways, and I especially. You know, Kate, I've been talking of doing a variety of things when I should be settled. For while my love for you made me impatiently desirous of doing something to raise myself, it also prevented me doing anything towards it—till I should be settled. That is, till I should have won you, for till then I could do nothing but love you, but now I have won you——”

“ You don't love me! Well, you needn't have said so,” put in Kate, in her most coquettish manner, and affecting to pout.

“ Oh, don't say that, Kate,” he said, with a look of intense pleading fondness, in which she read her absolute power over him. “ I know you're only jesting, dear; but I don't like you to talk that way, even in jest. You know I love you better than tongue can tell.”

“ Of course I do, Harry,” she said, interrupting him as he began to get tenderly reproachful, “ and I only spoke in joke, so don't be so serious about it, that's a dear.”

In assuming a coaxing tone, her lips were brought into a delicious pout, and she dropped her head, and glanced up at him sideways from under her veiling eyelashes, and altogether made herself look so charmingly pretty that Harry could not help springing from his seat and kissing her as he answered—

“ There now; let us say no more about that.

I almost deserve that you should think me a fool ; but then I love you so very much that the least thing touches me on that point. But what I was going to say was, that now I had won you it becomes me to show my love in action—to try and make something of myself for both our sakes. For yours, because, though while rich in each other's love, we may be very happy as we are, I would wish to see you in a better position. For my own, not only because I too would like to be better off, but also because I know there are many who would like to see me fail ; and for me to remain as I am would be failure. I've never opened my heart to any one else as I've done to you, Kate ; but still I've let it be seen that I have ambition, and believe myself to have talent, and some of those who have neither one nor the other would like to see me always kept down to their level."

During their courtship he had "opened his heart" to Kate very freely, had not only told her that he meant to be something more distinguished and profitable than a common working-man, but had gone into details concerning the ways and means by which he intended to achieve his determination. His talents he had magnanimously confessed did not lie directly in the money-making line—in the invention of useful machinery or novel garments, the striking out of new lines of amusement, or general trading.

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He had no hope, he admitted, of becoming a millionaire, nor, he had added, any desire of being merely that and nothing else. The bent of his genius, he had explained to her, was towards popular leadership. He hoped to become one of those kind of men of whom she might have read in newspapers—men who took the lead in movements, whose names were a recognised power, whose speeches and writings were recorded in public, and to whom millions looked up admiringly. He had confided to her that he had met some of the secondary stars of this class, and without wishing to be boastful he could say that they were not his equals either in point of education or general intelligence. In moments of enthusiasm he had hinted at the heights to which in the present day a member of the working classes, with his attainments and determination, might rise : to be editors of working-class organs, presidents of working-class leagues, working-men's M.P.'s, and the like. Positions which either directly or incidentally secured incomes that would be large to people brought up in the working-class ranks of life ; and gave a social standing such as money alone could not do. At the same time he had told her, as he had told himself, that while he purposed making his class serve his interests, he was really desirous of serving theirs. He would be willing to work for their advancement—to continue to improve and

add to his own knowledge in order that his self-education might serve them in their want of it. To champion them in their struggles with other classes, and beard opposing lions (say Tory Ministers or anti-trade-union masters and scribes of their inclining) in their dens, if the bearding was to be done in a public arena where a combatant who showed skill and courage might win the applause perhaps of all beholders, certainly of his backers—an important point to a professional gladiator.

Kate, being also ambitious in the sense that she would like to live on a showier scale, dress more extravagantly, do less work, and spend more money than any of her acquaintances, had been, as already stated, considerably influenced by this kind of talk. She had always lent an attentive ear to it, had come to perfectly understand Harry's views, and—his own talk as to his ability being borne out by general rumour—believe in the possibility of their complete, and certainty of their partial realization. There was no need to go into detail with her again ; she knew exactly the thoughts that were in his mind when on this first night by their own hearth he spoke to her of his ambition and talent, but she happened to be in a teasing mood, and in reply to his last observation about people without talent wishing to see him kept down to their level, she remarked—

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" Well, Charley Thompson used to say that it wasn't talent, but cheek that was wanted."

" Oh, naturally, there's nothing like leather, you know, and he happened to have a great deal of cheek and very little talent," answered Harry, changing countenance and speaking in a sneering tone.

There had always been a species of devilry in Kate's coquetry, and on this occasion she was desirous of experimenting in the art of husband managing. In knowledge of love as a science she was as much superior to Harry as he was to her in point of educational knowledge. She knew that it was really on her own account—on account of the suspicion still latent in his mind that there had been something more than mere friendship between her and Charley Thompson—that he had come to dislike the latter, and smiling to herself as she saw how the mention of the name irritated him, she answered, with a saucy toss of the head—

" Oh, I don't think that. If Charley had plenty of cheek he had plenty of talent too; and I don't know whether a mixture of the two isn't the best."

" It's a pity he isn't here to hear your high opinion of him."

" Oh, that's no particular high opinion," she answered. " I'm sure most of those who knew him thought he was quite as clever as cheeky, to say the least of it. And as for his hearing what

I say about him, I dare say he knew well enough that, like a good many others, I thought him a very nice fellow as well as a clever one. Indeed, at one time, I do believe we were pretty near all of us in love with him."

"And pray who might all of us have been?"

"Why, Bentley's lot, Harry!" she answered, with a look of innocent wonderment.

"Oh! well! They couldn't all have been in love with a fellow better able to return the compliment, by being in love, or saying he was, with all of them. There I can quite go with you, he *was* very clever at being every girl's lover while he was with her."

"And yet he seemed so much in earnest and was so nice about it," said Kate again, in her most innocent manner.

"Oh! he did make love to you then?" exclaimed Harry, the irritation he had been trying to conceal now finding unmistakable expression in the tone of his voice.

She had goaded him to bay, and it only remained to see with what ease she could bring him round again. She looked up at him with a prettily pathetic expression, and then in a voice in which grieved surprise and loving reproach were nicely combined, exclaimed—

"Why, Harry!"

In an instant he was subdued—was her slave again. In his mind there was no notion of co-

query on her part : her look and tone of injured feeling were real to him. His face became radiant with love again as he looked at her, and, in a low passionate tone, he exclaimed—

“ Forgive me, darling : I didn’t mean to be cross—not with you. It was thinking of how Thompson had served Fan that made me feel angry for a moment, but it was with him. Don’t think I could be ill-tempered with you, dear ; don’t think that.”

Her experiment had been as satisfactory as she could have desired. She saw that she could, in a homely phrase, be “ missis and master too ;” that in case of need she had only to pout and look pretty to get her own way ; had only to be cold and sulky over a denial to gain any concession to make it up. Her success put her in an especially cheerful mood, and she smiled good-humouredly as she said, in reply to his protestations—

“ Well ! I don’t know, Harry. I was beginning to think you could, and if you had, it would have been my fault. I shouldn’t have spoken as I did ; but I did not think of Fan’s affair at the time. However, let us drop all that, and go back to our own talk about buckling-to. I may as well talk about it a bit, for I’m afraid I shall not make much of a hand at doing it.”

“ Oh, never mind, dear,” he said ; “ you can

only do your best ; and perhaps you wont always have to do the practical part of it."

" Well, let us hope not," she said, in the same good-humoured tone ; " but still I shall have to make a start."

" And I dare say that will be the most difficult part in the whole affair," said Harry. " At any rate, that's how I find it with regard to my plans. I'm trying to hit upon some way of beginning to push myself on. There are several things that I am pretty sure of dropping into if they should become vacant ; but what I want is to cut out things for myself, not to wait to drop into them. However, as my father used to say, I must ' put my considering cap on ' ; and I dare say I shall think of something."

The "things" that Harry spoke of dropping into were, as his wife knew, the paid offices in connexion with his clubs. He had been a member of his Benefit Society for years, having joined it as a juvenile, and was now the best speaker, and one of the most generally active members of his lodge. He was already looked upon as the certain successor to the lodge secretaryship when it should be resigned by its present holder, whom age and asthma were each year making more and more incapable of coming out at night to discharge its duties. And that he might reasonably hope to rise still higher, perhaps to the highest office in the unity, was testified to by

the fact, that he was so favourably known by reputation to the other local lodges as to have been once already elected as the district delegate to the "annual moveable committee" of the order—an office that was much coveted—for which only men of mark were selected, and the duties of which (principally speech-making) those who had chosen him considered Harry discharged with honour alike to them and himself. Though owing to the regulations as to the age in joining it he was as yet barely a free member of his Trade Union—barely qualified to hold office in, or receive benefit from it—he was the leading orator of his branch, and its most distinguished member in a general way. From the day he had joined the Union he had taken a prominent interest in its affairs—had stood out boldly from the bulk of the members, but in a manner that had gained him the admiration of large numbers of them. Upon a point of detail which involved a principle he had by correspondence done battle with, and defeated the executive council—a parliament of delegates from metropolitan branches nominally acting in conjunction with, and to some extent controlling, but as a rule controlled by the officials of the central office who were practically the council. Their function was to act as a court of appeal and arbitration to the hundreds of branches scattered about the country, and their leading characteristics were a strong bias

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towards wire pulling, and (by consequence) a decided objection to being interfered with. In the opinion of this august body Harry Mason had added insult to injury in dealing with them. When, on issuing the periodical report of their own proceedings, which it was part of their duty to do, they gave a garbled account of the transaction in which he had been engaged, he attacked them again, and by threats of publishing the entire correspondence, compelled them to rectify their "mistake" in a subsequent report. For this and other interferences the Union powers that were hated him, and spoke spitefully of him as an officious meddler; but this was just as he would have wished it to be.

There were two schools in the Union—an old and a new—a risen and a rising school. The old school had organized the society; had conducted it hitherto, and were still in office; but their position was by no means so assured as it had been; the opposition had become strong, and was yearly gaining additional strength. Of the leading men of the old school it was said some held views that had become obsolete, or worse; that others having pretty well "feathered their own nests" at the expense of the society, and feeling certain that the Union would last their time, didn't care whether it lasted anybody else's, and adopted a rest-and-be-thankful policy. There were ugly rumours, too, of their "standing in" with printers,

to whom they were able to give work, and "doing well" out of travelling and other expenses allowed. To oust this set from office, the men of the new school seriously inclined. It was known that they now considered themselves strong enough to successfully run a man of their own for the first of what might be called the cabinet offices of the society that might fall vacant; and Harry Mason was spoken of as likely to be the candidate of their choice. Through the circulation of the printed reports it was known to all who took an active interest in the society that he was a specially bold, skilful, and energetic advocate of the doctrines of the new school; and through men who, in the course of their trade peregrinations, had passed through Stonebury, it was pretty widely understood in the trade that he was "a ripping speaker." Harry's look-out, therefore, was a bright one. So far as could be judged, he had only to watch and wait to succeed in the career he was ambitious of following. But while he was determined to watch closely he was not—for the reasons he had stated to his wife—disposed to wait idly.

What could he do though? That was the question he asked himself in vain for weeks. He thought over a variety of plans, only to come to the conclusion that they wouldn't do; but at length the wished-for idea flashed upon him without any effort, and like many other good

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ideas was, when once thought of, so simple and obvious that his only wonder was that it had not struck him before.

It was to start a co-operative store in Stonebury. He saw at a glance that it was practicable. The principle was known to be sound, and the railway men, many of whom had practically experienced the benefits of such societies in other places, would be sure to take the matter up as soon as it was suggested to them. He knew exactly the men to apply to in the first instance. Sandy Grant would go in for the thing on principle, and Joe Parkinson—whose opinion upon an affair of this sort would have great weight with his shopmates—would aid it partly on principle and partly for interest on his money.

Joe's part in this story will be a very small one, but as a type of a distinct school of working-men—a school which, though having many faults, is upon the whole perhaps one of the best of the numerous subdivisions which go to make up the general body of the working classes—he is worthy of being drawn in detail. He was nearer fifty than forty, and having as a boy worked at a period when the limitation of the hours of juvenile labour was not secured by the legislative action that now applies to them, he fully showed his age. His hair was scanty and grizzled, his brow wrinkled, and the general expression of his

face toilworn ; and he was thin and a little round-shouldered. He was a good, steady workman, naturally shrewd, but what he would himself have called a very poor " scollard." He could read ordinary English, understandingly in the end, if somewhat laboriously ; but his reading was as a rule limited to the perusal of his weekly newspaper—*Crusher's*. He regarded the articles in that paper as the acme of political wisdom and honesty, the piling up of epithets tickled his ear and gave him (especially the opprobrious ones) an idea of strength and straightforwardness ; and in common with *Crusher*, he was—in theory at any rate—a red-hot Republican. He looked upon monarchs as worse than useless, and if ornamental at all, not worth, on that ground, anything like the amount of money they cost. He honestly believed the aristocracy to be the " bloated, brutal, bloodsucking" body that his newspaper represented them to be, and was as honestly impressed with the belief that under Republican Government such things as ministerial jobbing or electoral corruption were unknown. He believed in the possibility of equality, and was of course a strong advocate for the independence of the working classes. But pending the putting down of the tyranny of capital and that extinction of the bloated aristocracy which must precede the redistribution of " the soil," which, as *Crusher* taught him, was as rightfully the possession of every man

as the air we breathed—pending the realization of these grand abstract measures, Joe was of opinion that it became every member of his class to try to make themselves as independent as they could by such less revolutionary measures as might offer.

Personally he was well to do beyond the average of working-men. His views upon the doctrine of the division of property would probably have been considerably modified had it been explained to him that if carried out it might have necessitated his handing over a part of his savings to sundry members of his own class whom he was in the habit of speaking of as wasterals—gentlemen who spent half their earnings in drink, and lost days at a stretch on the spree, and who being, as a natural result, chronically hard-up, could only have been on the receiving side in any redistribution of property. From his boyhood upwards he had been a saving fellow, and at thirty had married a servant of about the same age, and like himself of a thrifty disposition, and possessed of “a bit of money.” At the time of our story the house in which he lived was his own unmortgaged freehold. He had obtained it through the medium of the Stoneybury Land and Building Society, in which he still held shares that paid good interest, and he always kept a few loose pounds by him to meet emergencies that might arise. The men of the

wasteral type spoke of Joe as "a lucky old codger," and as, notwithstanding well-sounding saws to the contrary, even the best of workmen cannot be sure of always commanding employment, there might be a shade of truth in their view. But speaking broadly, there could be no doubt Joe's good fortune was of his own making ; was owing to his drinking little, sticking to his work regularly, taking care of his pennies and pounds, living and dressing plainly himself, and making his family do the same. In connexion with the last-named point, some of the genteeler people of his own rank said that it was a scandalous thing for a well-to-do man like him to send his youngest boy and girl to school, the one in clogs, and the other in a common cotton dress. But Joe, when he took any notice of this at all, argued that but for such economics he would not be well to do ; that moreover, stout home-knitted stockings and neatly-made clogs were more healthy and comfortable, as well as cheaper for a boy, than shop stockings and fancy boots ; and that cotton was good enough for any working-man's daughter while she was at school, and would be less dangerous wear than silk for many of them after they had left school.

Knowing Harry Mason to belong to the genteel section, and believing also that he treated the old school in the trade in a supercilious spirit, Joe (who was of the old school) had no particular

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liking for him—was in fact rather inclined to be down upon him than otherwise—but he was too practical a man to object to a good scheme merely because it happened to be proposed by a man with whose views upon other matters he did not agree. When, therefore, Harry asked him whether he would join Sandy Grant and himself in advocating the establishment of a co-operative store in Stonebury, he at once consented. At their first consultation the other two at once agreed with Harry that the thing would have to be started by the railway men, and they further decided that after ascertaining the feelings of a few of the leading hands, their next step would be to call a meeting in the shop. Accordingly, one Monday morning, some three months after Harry's marriage, written copies of the following notice were posted on the doors of the various departments of the works :—

“NOTICE.

“A meeting will be held in the pattern shop, at six o'clock on Thursday evening next, to consider the question of organizing a Co-operative Provision Store in Stonebury. All hands are respectfully requested to attend.

“By order,

“H. MASON,

“Secretary, *pro tem.*”

The pattern shop was the one in which all

public meetings of the hands were held, as it bore a nearer resemblance to an assembly room than any of the other apartments. It had a boarded floor, and ordinary windows instead of the heavy opaque stone-glass ones used in the shops in which pieces of metal were sometimes flying about. It was cleaner than the other shops, shavings and sawdust, which made up its litter, being, in the language of bulls, regarded as clean dirt; and its benches afforded a platform, and sitting room for from eighty to a hundred men—quite as large a proportion of the four or five hundred hands employed in the works as could ever be got to attend any meeting, the majority being content to follow the leaders and avoid personal trouble.

On the evening specified in the notice about sixty men and some half-a-dozen boys assembled in this shop. The boys, who came for a lark, were the first to arrive, rushing in the instant the bell rang, and immediately beginning to tumble among the shavings and throw lumps of wood at each other; but the fun of the latter species of amusement being only perceivable by themselves, brought them sundry kicks, cuffs, and curses from men who were struck by ill-aimed missiles. Two or three minutes after six, Harry and his two colleagues came in together, and the former at once commenced the proceedings, coming directly to the business in hand. He

knew that though when cleaned up after their evening meal, working-men will in a public hall, or their own club-room, listen admiringly to the lengthiest of florid speeches, the case was very different when they wanted their tea. Then they liked something short, sharp, and to the point. Men cannot listen well any more than work well upon an empty stomach, and Harry's love of speech-making was sufficiently tempered with discretion to make him respect, or at any rate humour, this feeling.

"Well, shopmates," he began, getting on to the bench which was used as a platform, "you all know from the notice that we are met here this evening to consider the question of starting a co-operative store in this town. Broadly speaking, it is a working-man's question, but as it belongs more particularly to the household department, and as I am a very young householder, I would rather that our friend Parkinson had brought it before you. But as I happened to be the first to broach the idea, he thinks that it lies with me to open it to the meeting; and I have the less reluctance in doing so, as really the subject is one that requires no advocacy. That the principle of co-operative stores is a sound and profitable one has long been demonstrated beyond all doubt, for such isolated cases of failure as can be pointed to merely go to prove what everybody knows—that bad manage-

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ment can spoil anything. Taking it for granted, then, that a co-operative store is, when properly managed, a most beneficial thing to its members, the only questions for us are, can we raise the necessary capital, and select officers and a committee from amongst ourselves capable, in conjunction with a practical manager, of conducting the concern successfully? I take it that no one here has so low an opinion of himself or his mates as to give a negative answer to the second question; and I think I shall be able to show that we may reasonably hope to answer the first in the affirmative. We—that is, Mr. Parkinson, Mr. Grant, and myself—have gone carefully into the matter, and we calculate that three hundred pounds would be sufficient to give us a start. It would be raised by the issue of one-pound shares, and if the amount can be got by single shares, only one share will be allotted to each subscriber. In case of need, however, I have got the names of a comparatively few men who will guarantee to take half of the shares among them, agreeing at the same time to give them up to in-coming shareholders as they might be required; and as I know it will be a recommendation, I will just mention that Mr. Parkinson is prepared to take twenty shares."

"Ah! but you'll have the counter-jumpers down on you for knobsticking them," shouted one of the biggest of the boys at this point.

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Whereupon another boy, three years younger, and a head and shoulders shorter than the first speaker, observed, with an exaggerated severity of tone—

“ Little boys should be seen, and not heard.”

To this second speaker another of the set called out, in a tone of command—

“ Kennel, puppy—kennel, sir”—but he had scarcely got the words out of his mouth when he received a hearty box on the ear from one of the men, and the interruption was brought to an end.

“ The first of our friends there,” resumed Harry, smiling, “ labours under a mistake in reference to this question. Co-operative stores do not injure countermen : on the contrary, their tendency is to afford additional employment for all classes really necessary to the work, either of production or distribution. The only persons whose interests can be damaged by the establishment of such stores are the middle-men, a class that certainly deserves no consideration at the hands of ours. A class whose own motto is not ‘ Live and let live’—but ‘ Live and make it hard to live.’ They are worse than useless : they’re obstructive ; and it’s their interest to be so—they’re the Tories of Commerce. They are as tollgates upon the road between production and consumption—a road which is a natural one, and should be free, and along which, if freed

from artificial barriers, the stream of traffic would flow more regularly, abundantly, and beneficially than it does at present. And as the action of co-operation is to sweep away these barriers by which the working classes suffer more than any others, I will simply propose, and Mr. Parkinson will second the resolution, 'That this meeting pledges itself to use its best endeavours to establish a co-operative store in Stonebury.'"

When the applause with which Harry's speech was greeted had subsided, Joe Parkinson rose. "You know, mates," he began, "I'm no speaker, but as Mason has told you, co-operative stores ain't things that want talking up; they ain't an experiment but a success, and their own best recommendation. I agree with all that Mason has said, especially about the middle-men. Why I'll be bound to say that there's at least a dozen of them live out of our daily food before we get it to live on, and that's one great reason why many a poor family often can't get enough to eat. But such a store as we talk of would knock off a lot of these middle profits, and what's more, knock off a lot of middle-men adulterations, for every interloper does a bit in that line until by the time it reaches the poorer classes of consumers, there's often more poison than nourishment in what we eat. If we start this store—as I expect we will—we shall deal direct with one of the big central working-men's co-operative

firms who actually manufacture or import some classes of goods, and in all other cases deal direct with the producers, or as close up to them as ever large purchases, ready-money, and plenty of it, can bring them. By having a store of our own we get the best articles, and fair weight, and at the end of each half-year we divide among ourselves the profits that would have gone to the middle-men ; and if that isn't the sort of thing for us to support, I should just like to know what is?"

Here he came to pause, and looked round with an air of challenge, whereupon one of the men, who it was pretty notorious was very much under petticoat government, observed—

"Ah, but you seem to forget that the women have a deal to do with this sort of thing ; they don't like these stores."

This gave an opening to the boys, who immediately began to call out—"Silence, washerwoman!" "What did you do with that sixpence I gave you for pocket-money, John?" "That'll do for father," and other phrases of a similar kind.

They were, however, speedily cuffed into silence again, and then Parkinson, turning to the man who had spoken, answered—

"Oh, I know *some* women object to the stores, but I thought it better not to speak of them sort in case any one's corns should be trod

on. They are the sort who are afraid of their own husband's knowing how they spend his wages,—who put down a drop of brandy as half a pound of candles, and a fancy bonnet as so much groceries,—who give fine teas to gossiping acquaintances, and feed their husbands on the leavings—the third watering of the teapots, and the plain bread the gossips couldn't eat because they had had too much cake. The women of that stamp do object to the co-operative stores, because the checks show to a halfpenny what they've spent. But there's one good thing, such women are so few compared with the tidy ones, that though they do lead their husbands by the nose, we needn't bother ourselves about them—and so I second the motion that we start a store."

The proposition was put and carried, and the introductory talk being over, the remaining business was pushed through with rapidity. A considerable number of shares were subscribed for on the spot; a committee consisting of three others, added to the three who had brought the matter forward, was appointed; Joe Parkinson was elected treasurer, and Harry Mason was confirmed in his post of secretary.

During the next few days the thing was pushed among those who had not attended the meeting, and was carried among those employed in the running and station departments of the railway.

At the end of three weeks the required sum was subscribed, and a month later the store was in active operation, with Harry Mason before the public as its originator, and his name figuring on all its official documents. And looking at this, Harry congratulated himself upon his first step in the career of a working-man's friend having been attended by perfect success.

## CHAPTER III.

## HOME SKELETONS.

ALTHOUGH some year or two ago there was a sensational break-out of the co-operative movement in connexion with the Civil Service, a service which is nothing if not genteel, a co-operative provision store is not in a general way regarded as a genteel institution. The natives of Stonebury consequently looked upon the establishment of such a store in their terribly genteel town with great disfavour. It was regarded as out of harmony with the taste—and musical-glasses air which characterized the native promoted institutions of the town, as being an undesirable transplantation from the large Radical non-genteel towns in which, as Stonebury had vaguely heard, vulgar discontented "hands," who attended meetings in their dirty working clothes, got up movements of this kind and spoke evil of dignities and the genteel. The local tradesmen, especially grocers and provision dealers, took up their parable against it, and the local newspapers took up the cause of the tradesmen.

The *Gazette* and the *Herald*, the journalistic representatives of the two great rival factions in the town council, and of course in a general way deadly enemies, made truce on this point, made common cause against the common enemy. The *Gazette*, in an article on "Playing at Shop," and the *Herald*, in one entitled, "Doing as you would not be done by," were alike "scathing" on the store. The one observed that though we might be a nation of shopkeepers, we were not a nation in which it would be well for every man to be his own shopkeeper. This, it would have been thought, must have been obvious to the meanest capacity, and they were therefore surprised to find that a number of people in Stonebury, but not of it, were about to introduce that absurd but still mischievous system in that locality. It then went on to speak of foolish amateurs who rushed in where wise professionals feared to tread, and wound up by prophesying that the said amateurs would find that they would have to pay dearly for their whistle—would in fact be ruined by it.

The *Herald*, after commenting in disparaging terms upon the store, observed—"Were it not boastfully paraded by themselves, it would scarcely be credited that this precious adventure has been set on foot by the *employés* of the railway, and more particularly by those engaged in the locomotive department. 'And what does it matter which particular section of them has done this

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thing?' some indignant reader may perhaps ask. To such reader we would answer :—Well, it *does* matter somewhat. The mechanics engaged in the department specified are, we are given to understand, almost to a man, trade unionists, and as such, will of course argue that the cobbler should stick strictly to his last; that no man should in the least encroach upon another's business; that, in a word, to use their own elegant phraseology, there should be no knob-sticking; and yet here are they, headed by a gentleman who, we are informed, is a budding, indeed a considerably budded agitator, eagerly willing, though as they will find to their cost, pitifully unable, to knob-stick respectable tradesmen whose capital, time, and labour are alike embarked in their trade."

Despite all this, however, the anathemas of tradesmen and scathings from the local press, the store went on flourishingly. The manager engaged turned out to be a thoroughly competent one. The shareholders, a good body of customers in themselves, were pledged by the strongest of all ties, self-interest, to support it personally. While by pointing out to neighbours that many of the store articles were really less adulterated than those supplied in the ordinary way of retail trade, and that even non-shareholding purchasing purchasers would be allowed a certain participation in bonuses, they induced others to deal there. And numbers of chance customers, dis-

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covering these advantages for themselves, became regular ones. But it was not until their first half-yearly meeting that the co-operators were able to fairly crown their edifice. At that meeting, after setting aside a sum as the nucleus of a reserve fund, and paying five per cent. on share capital, they were enabled to declare a dividend on purchases of one shilling and seven pence in the pound to shareholders, and half that amount to non-shareholders. Their balance-sheets were published, and once more the society became the talk of the town, but this time the tone both of the press and people, with the exception of the tradesmen directly interested in the matter, was more favourable. Gentility of the poorer sort put its pride in its pocket when the prospect of profit was thus brought fairly before it, and there came such a rush of new members that in less than a month the share capital was trebled. In short, the co-operators, like other successful people, found that nothing succeeds like success, while Harry Mason personally was proudly conscious that "all own the chief when fortune owns the cause."

He could see this in a variety of ways, and one of the most satisfactory proofs of it was that at an extraordinary meeting called to consider the question of extending their business, the shareholders unanimously resolved that the rate of pay to their secretary should be raised from

ten to twenty-five pounds a year—a very nice addition to an income of thirty shillings per week. A little later he made a further progressive step. The workman who acted as secretary to the Stonebury branch of the Trade Society leaving the town, Harry was elected in his place, and though the pay was only some three pounds a year, the appointment gave him official and other "moral weight" advantages.

So much—and it was more than even his warmest admirers had expected from him—Harry Mason had achieved within twelve months of his marriage. To lookers on he appeared to be making his way brilliantly. The general verdict was "that he was doing well in the world, and no mistake," but while the men spoke in unqualified terms some of the women would add—"And he would need to be too, and see how his wife carries on;" and in his inmost heart Harry himself would now have confessed that this last remark was but "owre true." He loved his wife as devotedly as ever, but by this time he had become painfully conscious that in almost every respect, save the steadfastness of his own love, his marriage was a mistake. That his mother's and not his view of the matter had been correct. That his marriage was one to mar not make a man. He had already begun to feel it crippling him. Though he could truly say of his wife that with all her faults he loved her still, he had come from

bitter experience to see that she had faults—many, and not light. That she was extravagant, wasteful, idle, frivolous, affected, and selfish—in a word, fine-ladyish.

To assist him in furnishing a home and to defray the expenses of his wedding trip, his sister had lent him every halfpenny of her savings, amounting at the time to about twenty pounds. This was to have been repaid by instalments of five shillings a week from his wages, and the setting aside of any extra income he might make. Had this arrangement, which was anything but oppressive to him, been carried out, the debt would have been entirely wiped out in a year. But now, at the end of that time, only three pounds had been paid off, thanks to his wife's extravagance in dress and improvidence in housekeeping. Since his marriage, his own style of dress and living had been such that, with corresponding self-denial upon her part, their expenditure would have been within the five-and-twenty shillings per week to which he had calculated it might be limited for the first year or two of their married life. His mother and sister rarely alluded to the non-payment of the debt; but though their silence was really intended to be merciful, he felt it as acutely as he could have done the loudest reproaches. After the manner in which the question of his marriage had been discussed among them, he knew

that they must take his continued indebtedness as confirmation strong of the correctness of their view—that he had made a fool of himself. He could easily guess that, though they might not name the thing when he was by, they would at other times “reckon up” Kate and pity him. Yes; even little Fan, whom he had been wont to treat so patronizingly, would pity him—and not without reason.

Another point which, apart from its practical evils, gave him a sense of humiliation from the supposition that it would afford a ground of triumph to those who had opposed his marrying, was the manner in which since his marriage Kate had conducted herself with respect to her parents. At first, she had been as anxious as Mrs. Mason herself could have been to keep them at a distance. But they were not at all the kind of people to be kept at bay, if they thought that there was anything to be gained by thrusting themselves forward, and they certainly calculated upon gaining something by their daughter's marriage. Finding, therefore, that to keep them off she would have to quarrel with them, and endure the consciousness that they were going about representing her as a monster of ingratitude—one who, being in a position to do so, would not aid her parents, even though their need for aid rose from the sacrifices they had made for her. Finding that this would be the case on the one hand,

while on the other they would do her suit and service, and sing her praises abroad, Kate adopted a policy of conciliation, and treated her parents with all the lavish liberality of those who are generous before they are just.

"Mother" was constantly coming about the house, and, in addition to eating and drinking there, rarely went empty away. On this last point she was complacently euphemistic.

"I'll just borrow a loaf of you, Kate," she would say, taking one up and wrapping it in her apron. "I ought to have baked to-day, and we're rather short." Or looking at a cold joint, she would ask, with a business-like air—"I say, Kate, would you mind letting one have a slice or two off that—about enough for father and me, and I'll make it up to you again? It'll save me cooking, you know, and it wont do for us to burn any more coals than we have need to." In the same business-like way she would, when Kate was going to market, ask her to bring her half a pound of butter, a few apples, or a bit of bacon, or something of that kind, in with hers. Occasionally she would "be halves" with Kate on a larger scale—in the purchase, for instance, of a ton of coals; but while she took her full share of the goods, her share of the payment was never forthcoming. And though at this time Harry knew nothing of it, his wife and mother-in-law had also joint transactions with tallymen,

in which, though the latter was the chief negotiator, he, through his wife, had been and was to be the greatest sufferer. With respect to the reversion of Kate's wearing apparel, Mrs. Fairfield was more candid. She would say plainly, that "Kate might give her this or that garment, as it was getting shabby, or didn't suit her (Kate);” but when money was in question, she returned to the pretence of borrowing. She always asked for the sixpence or shilling, of which she seemed to be chronically in want, as a loan. Nay, on those more special occasions when her so-called loans went to the extent of half-a-crown, she would expressly request to be reminded of it in case she *should* happen to forget. But Kate quite understood her mother's conventional fictions; knew that her "happening to forget" was a foregone conclusion, and that she would have taken any reminder as an insult.

"Mother" of course thought that all this was as it ought to be; but she readily guessed that there were sundry evil-minded persons—chiefly friends of the Masons—who were of a directly contrary opinion upon that point. These people she thought might attempt to interfere with her prerogative, and therefore, on what she considered self-protective grounds, she adopted a policy of covert insult towards them when they came about her daughter's house. Having prefaced her remarks by observing that she was a plain-spoken

woman, or one who always told her mind, or never went behind a person's back if she had anything to say about them, she would proceed under the very transparent disguise of talking about "some people," to insinuate that it was the visitors who had self-seeking designs in courting Kate's company. Individuals thus insulted made observations upon the treatment they had received, and some of these remarks came to Harry's ear, as did also one which his mother-in-law frequently made, to the purpose that she did not know what they (Kate and he) would do without her. For though in her pottings about the house she did nothing but gossip, and cast about her to mark what she could bear away or set herself down as heir to, she had another pleasant fiction to the effect that it was to suit Kate she visited her so much. And on this and the slight fact that she had occasionally taken charge of the key when the young couple were going out, she had founded the report of her indispensable usefulness to them.

"Father" had become even more systematically free of the house than "Mother." At his own home he was in the habit of assisting in the house-work by washing floors, black-leading grates, peeling potatoes, cleaning knives and boots and the like, and after for some time making a practice of calling at his daughter's merely in quest of his favourite loan of the "price of a pint," he

was regularly engaged to do the same sort of work there in consideration of receiving a pint of ale per day and sixpence on Saturday. When this arrangement was first put into practice he would come in the morning, get through his work, receive his ale (with bread and cheese thrown in), and take his departure. Before long, however, he began to stay to dinner occasionally, and in a short time this, too, became a regular thing. Though he submitted to this, Harry Mason was emphatically of opinion that his father-in-law was *not* a guest that well became his table. He made himself rather too much at home, was excessively free, even though he could see he was not particularly welcome. He was a large eater and a dainty one too, so far as circumstances would allow. He helped himself freely to the best cuts and the largest share of the beer, and turned up his nose at food that Harry—who had been accustomed to plain living—was quite content with. He rated Kate about the cooking, which it must be confessed was often more curious than nice, and altogether acted as though he was the founder of the feast, and Harry and his wife guests on sufferance.

When sober—by reason of being unable to obtain the wherewithal to get intoxicated—Father would also drop in upon Harry and his wife in the evening, and having helped himself to Harry's tobacco, would proceed to tell boast-

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ful stories of his former greatness—stories over the telling of which he chuckled and laughed discordantly, though to Harry they seemed to be dull and meaningless as well as interminable and untruthful. But, however coldly his stories might be received, he would prose away at them until the supper was produced, when he would again help himself to the largest share, especially of the drink, at the same time making remarks that under the circumstances were anything but grateful. They were generally to the effect that though bread and cheese and a drop of beer were very well in their way, they were more suitable for a snack between breakfast and dinner than for supper. For his own part, he preferred hot suppers, and considering she hadn't much else to do, Kate might make a bit of something hot. Even if she didn't go to the length of meat and potatoes she might at any rate do the bread and cheese into Welsh-rabbits, which, served hot and flavoured with ketchup, were an immense improvement upon the plain articles.

All this was sufficiently aggravating, but bad as was Father's conduct when he was sober, it was worse when he was drunk ; and though he had to procure his drink by precarious shifts and could stand a goodly quantity of it, he generally managed to get drunk about twice a week. At these times he would go to the house, or more annoying still, would meet Harry coming from

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his work, and in very strong language demand pre-payment of the sixpence coming due to him on the Saturday, often after it had once already been advanced. On these attempts at petty extortion being objected to, Father would first become pot-valiantly abusive and then maudlin ; would call Harry Mr. Clever-devil, Mr. Touch-me-not, and other names; inquire who he thought he was, and whether he supposed people were going to be done out of their rights ; inform him that if he did suppose so he was expletively well mistaken ; that there were some persons who would not be done, and that he (Father) was one of them. This line of attack failing, he would then change his tone ; talk reproachfully of the ingratitude of children, and especially children-in-law, who seemed desirous to bring their poor old father in sorrow to the grave, and all for the sake of a sixpence or even the price of a pint.

The general opinion however was that it was solely upon Harry that the sorrow of the connexion fell. It was Harry's own opinion too, and time after time, when the proceedings of his father and mother-in-law became particularly offensive, he resolved to " put a stop to this sort of thing altogether." But he seldom got further than resolving—never beyond a mild " Well, upon my word, Kate, this is rather too bad, you know." If Kate would have joined him in the work, he

would have got rid of his objectionable relations speedily enough. But she was one of those who liked peace to herself at any price to another. She knew that her parents fully understood the situation ; that if they were discarded from the house they would blame her for it, and by an outcry against her ingratitude make themselves as great a nuisance to her as they now were to her husband. To her the position they had taken up in the house was the lesser of two evils, and she preferred to abide by it. Seeing this, seeing that a quarrel with her parents—and only by a quarrel, by an utter severance of connexion, could he hope to get rid of them—would probably lead to some coolness or misunderstanding between Kate and himself, Harry, when it came to the sticking point, ever found himself disarmed by his slavish love. His resolves to “put a stop to it” remained unfulfilled, his father and mother-in-law continued to reign in his household, while his own mother and sister seldom entered it, and his friends, however they might admire him in other respects, in this one spoke of him with pity or contempt—and he knew it.

But while the knowledge that these phases of the misery of his married life were known to and commented upon by others was very bitter, there was another phase of that misery which in itself affected him more deeply than either his indebtedness to his sister or the infliction of his parents-

in-law. As often happens with young couples among the working classes, Kate and he, while keeping company, had never seen each other save when "cleaned up." It was thus he had generally pictured her in those "visioned scenes of home" in which all men who marry for love indulge when courting. At stray moments he certainly had remembered that she could not always be cleaned up to the full extent—that she would have her house-work to do. Even then, however, he had imagined her as specially graceful; as looking scarcely less charming perhaps in her clean, close-fitting, short-sleeved housewife's dress of light cotton, than she had done in the billowy muslin one she had worn when first they met on the morning of the picnic. But when, after marriage, he came to look upon this picture and that; upon his own ideal, and the reality presented by Kate, he found that it was a case of Hyperion to a satyr—and the ideal was Hyperion. The contrast between Kate "cleaned up"—Kate as she appeared in public, and Kate in the *déshabille* in which she went about her household duties—struck Harry as a thing to shudder at. She had no washable house-dresses, such as he knew should be the only wear of tidy housewives when getting through the rougher portions of their daily work. She had no money to spare for dresses of that kind, all that she could get being expended on the finer ones in which she

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went abroad, and it was some of the tawdriest of this finery that, when it had become dirty and dilapidated, she wore as house-dresses. She went about her cooking and cleaning in dresses which, in addition to exhibiting gaping rents, stiff shining patches of grease, and a wreckage of torn trimmings flowing free about them, were generally huddled on in a style that gave prominence to these defects. She wore old boots so down in the heel as to give glimpses of her slackly-gartered, dirt-clouded white stockings. Her hair was uncombed, and her face, besides being smudged, generally wore a discontented look. In short, Kate was a thorough slattern. Her house-keeping was not in the Mason but the Fairfield style, and led to an uncomfortable home life. To buttonless shirts, undarned stockings, and unrepaired clothing generally; to late, ill-cooked, make-shift meals; a cheerless fireside, a disorderly household, wasteful expenditure, and worst of all in Harry's estimation, to that metamorphosis in Kate's personal appearance just spoken of. No one was better aware than herself that she looked "such a figure" in her morning *deshabille*, and she carefully guarded against friends or acquaintances seeing her in it. Father cleaned the steps, and did any other outside work of that kind, and he usually answered the door, and so gave Kate an opportunity of tidying herself up a bit before showing, in case

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the callers were for her. But with Harry there could be none of this partial concealment. He saw her day after day with all her slovenly imperfections on her head, and the sight went nearer than all the rest to completely emancipating him from the mere slavishness of love that was ruining him. Unfortunately for both of them, however, it did not go quite far enough to break his chains ; or perhaps it would be more accurate to say it was not continuous enough to do so. Could he have seen her constantly thus for a month he would probably have been nerved to shake off the moral shackles in which he was held ; would have found himself equal to such a high-handed exercise of authority as might have been the salvation of them both. But each evening the partially broken spell was renewed. Kate, so to speak, cast her grub skin, and came forth in the bright butterfly style which had first captivated him, and still entranced and made him powerless to chide. When he found her "cleaned up" again, smiling and looking her prettiest upon him, addressing him as "dear," and consulting him on small matters with a charming air of submission—when on coming home of an evening he found her thus, resolves to give her a good talking to, that he might have formed when smarting under a sense of her slovenliness, vanished, and he was her willing thrall again. Kate saw this even more plainly than he felt it.

After experience had confirmed the correctness of her first experiments, she could do what she liked with him.

So while superficial observers spoke of Harry Mason as one who should be happy because he appeared prosperous, he regarded himself—when he dared to think coolly of his surroundings—as a most unfortunate being. Complete love blindness would at least have left him happy till a crash had come, but his partial disenchantment brought an almost constant sense of present misery into his life. He was in the painful position of knowing his marriage was a ruinous mistake, while at the same time he was still too much under the glamour of an infatuated love to take the only course that might rectify the mistake.

But all the disenchantment of the marriage was not upon Harry's side. Kate, too, had had her disappointments in connexion with it, but she not being infatuatedly in love—unless with herself—had managed to overcome the more practical of them in a tolerably satisfactory manner. She had soon discovered that her pre-conceived ideas of what was to be the style of their home life differed materially from Harry's. His notions she found were that, for some time at any rate, their life should be of the thoroughly domesticated kind; that she should during the daytime devote herself exclusively to the neat

and economical management of their household ; and in the evening be a fireside companion to him. But her notions, as might easily have been guessed, were not of the thoroughly domesticated but fine-lady-ish type, and by coaxing him to consent to some things and acting without his knowledge in others, she contrived to have her own way. To manage her household in the manner already spoken of, to dress more extravagantly than other working-men's wives, and as far as she could, cut them and associate with genteel people ; to have her genteel friends to tea at her house, return their visits and join them in seeking amusement. Her greatest disappointment, however, like Harry's, arose from her never having seen him in his working guise until after they were married. Harry "cleaned up," and talking sentiment—Harry in a love fervour, bodying forth ambitious schemes, and implying, as lovers will do, that to intend is to achieve where love is the incentive to attainment. Harry, with his rhapsodical compliments, leading her to believe that if he did not exactly regard her as a being too bright and good for human nature's daily food, he at any rate thought her too beautiful and ethereal to be called upon to perform the household drudgery that falls to the lot of ordinary working-men's wives. The Harry of this picture struck Kate as a very different and much more desirable being than the Harry

who came home from work with black hands and face, and jackets and over-alls grimed and greasy. Who, when she stopped late at private tea parties, would sometimes querulously observe that she might be at home to let a fellow in, and that it wasn't pleasant to come home tired and hungry, and then have to kick your heels on your own door-step. Who, even when she was there to receive him at tea-time, would still sometimes indulge in such grumbling remarks as that she might have a drop of hot-water ready to wash a fellow, or have his clothes aired and laid out for him when she knew he had to be at his club as early as possible. Who, when she did pass an evening at home with him, expected her to take an interest in such things as co-operation, while, despite a show of attention and sympathy, he was himself now evidently cool upon such subjects as the dancing parties at Steperson's, the flirtations of Bentley's young ladies, tea-table scandal, the plots of to-be-continued stories, and the dresses of his neighbours, or rather of his neighbours' wives and daughters. Who, she would scarcely have cared about recognising in his working-clothes had she met him when she was with any of her genteel acquaintances to whom he was not already known. Who, worse than all, had at first shown that he had taken it as quite a thing of course that she should wash these same dirty

working clothes. But she had soon rid herself of this indignity, making such an outcry about the manner in which the work spoiled her hands, and washing them so very badly, that after one or two trials Harry was fain to have them sent out to be done. Having gained so much in this direction, Kate took care that the rest of the washing should speedily follow ; and Mother, ever watchful of such opportunities, took equally good care to send the larger portion of her washing with Kate's, and so get it done on the cheap.

In short, Kate, though with a view to getting her own way she was often fussily affectionate about him, was much less favourably impressed with Harry as a husband than she had been as a lover. She acknowledged to herself that he had got on a bit since they had been married, but at the same time she also began to say to herself that, after all, he was only an ordinary working-man—one of those black greasy sort of fellows of whom in common with the rest of Bentley's young ladies she had at one time professed to have such a contempt. She contrasted him unfavourably with the undoubtedly genteel young men whom she might have had ; but only in a general way until, about the time our story has now reached, an event occurred which brought this contrast to a strictly personal and individual

bearing,—a bearing by which Harry suffered ; by which he appeared to her in a more commonplace and distasteful light than he had done before, and which caused her also to regard their marriage as a ruinous mistake—for her.

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